

Lifebytes:

31. God's Warning For Today *Jeremiah's Call to Repentance*



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Dear Friends,

You'll notice a new cover on this Lifebyte. That's because our Lord has called us at this time to fulfill an assignment He gave us when we were in Israel in 1993. We'll explain this shortly, but first consider deeply in your spirit the words of God to his reluctant young prophet, Jeremiah:

**“Get yourself ready!
Stand up and say to them whatever I
command you.
Do not be terrified by them, or I will
terrify you before them.
Today I have made you a fortified city,
an iron pillar and a bronze wall to
stand against the whole land—
against the kings of Judah, its officials,
its priests and the people of the land.
They will fight against you but will
not overcome you,
for I am with you and will rescue
you,’ declares the LORD”**
(Jeremiah 1:17-19).

How would *you* like the assignment God presented to Jeremiah? Over a period of many years the persecuted prophet spoke forth the messages his Lord wanted him to share with the people of Jerusalem. But, in the end, few listened and the Great City was destroyed.

The inhabitants refused to repent of their sins. They couldn't believe that God would rain such disaster upon them. In response, they heaped abuse upon the doleful but faithful messenger.

We want to take you back 13 years so that you'll understand the nature of this Lifebyte and the series to follow:

In the fall of 1993 Sue and I were leaving a retreat ministry of almost 11 years. We had no idea what we were

going to do next. The years of hosting and teaching retreat groups, counseling clergy, and keeping up the sixty acres of farmland had taken a toll on our marriage.

Our exodus wasn't a “two-week notice and leave” type of situation. Much was involved in finding a suitable home for the livestock as well as tying up countless ministry loose ends. During the two-month time frame between our intent to step down and our actual departure, though, God began to reveal His plan for us.

Three days after we agreed with our Board to leave the retreat center, our friend, Bert Schlossberg, phoned. Bert, who had emigrated to Israel five years earlier with his family, was visiting relatives in the next town and wanted to see us.

Through our Lord's clear revelation and subsequent confirmation, God directed us to go to Israel to live with Bert's family outside Jerusalem for an unknown period of time. Now, you have to understand that, up until this time, going to Israel was close to the bottom of things I, Mike, wanted to do.

The morning after Bert's visit I got up early and knelt in our living room, crying out, “Lord, please show me why You have us going to Israel.” Then I did something I'd seldom done before. I let the Bible flip open on its own. My eyes fell on God's recruitment of Jeremiah, in the passage quoted earlier.

I knelt there and sobbed, especially when I read, **“I am with you and will rescue you.”** I knew then that this wasn't just a vacation trip to Israel. Whatever the Lord had planned for my future, He would have to *rescue* me.

Several days later I received a letter from a man I'd never met. “You're going to Israel on a *prophetic mission*. Please fax

me anything the Lord shows you while you're there!"

God's plan continued to unfold once we landed in Israel. Our first day there Bert and I were standing next to the Tower of David in the Old City sector of Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit spoke to my spirit, **"Mike, you are going to be part of a Gentile Awakening."** I had no clue what He was talking about.

The following month Sue and I took part in a prayer conference in Jerusalem. A pastor from Memphis whom I'd never met walked up to me and put his hand on my shoulder. "The Lord would have you know three things." The first two he mentioned were private prayer concerns about which Sue and I were seeking the Lord. We'd told no one else about these particular needs.

The man continued, "The Lord would also have you know that He has brought you here so that you would go back to the States with a *prophetic message*."

Sue and I had first heard the word "Hebraic" during that prayer conference. A speaker had just finished quoting Zechariah 9:13, **"I will bend Judah as I bend My bow and fill it with Ephraim. I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior's sword."**

A prophetic explanation expanded on that verse: "Now, throughout the world, the Lord is pouring forth a *Hebraic understanding of the Scriptures* to undo what the ancient Greeks had done."

After the conference Sue and I pored over all we could find on the early Church. When we had concluded our research, the Holy Spirit impelled us to use the word **"Hebraic Restoration"** to define that which we saw our Lord restoring to His Church around the

world. The Spirit gave us no further explanation at that time, however, of *why* we should use the word "Hebraic."

The Holy Spirit also implanted in our minds the **Restoration Diagram** so that people could visualize the *relational priorities* He was restoring.



"Stand up and say to them whatever I command you"

Since we came back from Israel we've been sharing the Hebraic foundations as our Father commanded us. But over the years we've observed a growing darkness — the *toleration for sin* that permeates much of western Christendom today.

During the past few years our Lord kept us focused on what we needed to share about the Hebraic foundations. Only occasionally would He stir us to address some of the spiritual darkness, such as in the articles, **"I Hate Nicolaitanism"**, **"IMPUDENCE—Reflection of the Anti-Christ Spirit in Today's Church"**, **"The Hebraic Restoration Confronts the Jewish Roots Movement"**, and some others.

But in recent days, as we taped *The Home* portion of our **Jesus In Your Home** video series, He has commanded us to reveal areas of sin that are entrenched in people who call themselves "Christian". As with Jeremiah, *His love* is compelling Him to sound a warning by citing the sins of His ancient people. The Bible reveals again and again that our Lord offers *prophetic warning* before He upholds His holy standards and brings chastisement on the people.

David Wilkerson penned a book several years ago entitled, ***God's Plan to Protect His People in the Coming Depression***. It's excellent reading! He writes:

In the *dark days* ahead, when the majority will be satisfied merely with surviving and hoping for deliverance from hell, God will have a *precious remnant outside of all religious systems who will seek Him with their whole hearts*. (emphasis added)

Recently, Christian pollster George Barna stated that there are 20 million people in the U.S. who are looking for what the earliest Church had. The Hebraic foundations are meant for people such as these who hunger for relational intimacy and spiritual power in Jesus.

When we finished writing our book, ***Pastoring by Elders***, the Holy Spirit impressed on us to close with this:

The Gospel of the dark period to come will not be the 'easy believism' of most so-called gospels found in the U.S. today. Unbelievers will reject these for what they are, shallow and man-made.

Times will be so desperate that seekers will want the Gospel that Jesus spoke of: ***"Whoever trusts in Me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him"*** (John 7:28).

We write to you today with full conviction that darkness *is* going to descend on the U.S. Those who already trust Jesus as their Lord and King may be compelled to trust Him with their very lives in the dark days. These people have learned to question their traditions and

religious practices. They have wholeheartedly sought biblical truth and are already suffering for putting it into practice. They are the "precious remnant outside of all religious systems"— the ones who will be the light our Lord will use in the dark days to come.

Friends, *now* is the time for you to **sincerely question**, to **earnestly seek**, and to **undeniably know**. Only a heart that has learned to *trust God* will carry you through the coming dark period. *Now* is the time of heart preparation.

We believe that it is for *this time of preparation* that our Lord took us to Israel almost 13 years ago to research the Hebraic foundations of the Church. If His people are to serve the Lord in the dark days ahead, each one of us must be spiritually powerful and relationally intimate in our love for Jesus and for one another.

Only the Hebraic foundations — *unflagging devotion* to our Lord and to His priorities— can accomplish this! Explore and appropriate the priorities of the earliest Church. We must prepare our hearts, our purpose, our very lives before darkness descends on this land in ever-increasing measure.

Remember this:

The righteous are not exempt from suffering, but are comforted and delivered in their suffering.

Some of you reading this may be like the Israelite leaders to whom Jeremiah prophesied. You find it hard to believe that there are ***"Dark Days of Chastisement"*** coming. Yet, the United States has already been judged in her unrepentance, and nothing can prevent that judgment. As we mentioned: Most of Israel refused to believe Jeremiah's warning. God even cautioned the prophet:

“So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with Me, for I will not listen to you...”

When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer” (Jeremiah 7:27,16).

In 1998, we asked our Father when the Dark Days of Chastisement would come upon the U.S. He responded, ***“The children of today will not become grandparents before My chastisement comes.”***

Because He must uphold His holiness God intends to chastise this nation for its rebellion and lawlessness. Those who hide behind the religious system believing that their Nicolaitan intermediaries and programs will protect them will face this chastisement as well. Only those who have ears to hear will respond to the Spirit’s call and the messengers He sends, and repent.

Until the Dark Days of Chastisement come, we’re pressing on to “share the Hebraic foundations,” that is, to make people aware of both His relational priorities and the life enactment of love-grounded obedient trust our Lord has made clear since His servant Abraham.

Just as His pattern with Jeremiah, our Father urged us to continue sharing the Hebraic foundations even though they wouldn’t be widely embraced in the United States until the Dark Days of Chastisement come. At that time, people would *desperately need Jesus* and be willing to turn from their sin to love and serve Him.

We hope you’ll take this to heart in prayer. In upcoming Lifebytes we’ll be sharing what God has against those who call themselves “Christian” in this country but live according to the world’s val-

ues, priorities and standards. So please, read these *with your spirit*. Don’t try to rationalize or reason why the God who never changes might in this instance alter His Word and His ways.

Remember His warning voiced in both Testaments:

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion (Hebrews 3:15).

When Jerusalem fell to the Babylonian army our Lord sent to chastise the Israelites for their sinful wickedness, even the heathen commander, Nebuzaradan, understood why his troops were victorious. He told Jeremiah:

The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place. And now the LORD has brought it about; He has done just as He said He would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey Him (Jeremiah 40:2,3).

We’ll be sharing with you what our Father has against much of Christendom in the U.S. It’s painful for us to do this. We’re experiencing some of what Jeremiah must have felt in face of such hardness of heart in Judah and Jerusalem. But a remnant *did* listen to him! Our heart’s desire is for such earnest, God-seeking response today among those who have ears to hear.

Our Lord indicated *how* He wants us to share in this series of Lifebytes:

- 1. We will be citing His issues with ancient Israel.**
- 2. We will point out the parallels He sees in western Christendom today.**
- 3. We will explain His steps for you to flee sin and walk righteously.**

Why Did God Warn the Israelites?

“Thus says the LORD, ‘What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty?’”

(Jeremiah 2:5)

In order to understand why our God dealt with the Israelites of Jeremiah’s time as He did, we need to review His history with them.

God had kept the Israelites in Egypt for over 400 years to “*make a nation*” out of the 12 tribes. He wanted “one nation under God.” In His timing they cried out to Him, displaying their utter dependence on Him. In response, God sent a deliverer, Moses.

God showed Himself powerful by executing 10 plagues against 10 false gods of Egypt. Next He led the journeying Israelites by way of the Red Sea and the barren desert so they would grow in their dependence on Him. But how did they respond, even in the face of needing Him more than ever? They rebelled. They became idolaters (see Exodus 32).

If the Israelites could defy God when they were so dependent on Him to get them through the desert, what do you think they were like after they settled comfortably in the Promised Land?

Our God foresaw what would happen when they felt secure and didn’t think they needed Him any longer. Before they ever arrived in the land of Israel He issued a warning to them in Deuteronomy 8:5-20 that we today should scrutinize for a message for our own lives:

Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.

Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land (8:5-7).

This land of promise would be filled with fresh flowing streams, abundant crops of all types, even minerals from which they could craft tools and weapons. Yet God warned them that prosperity would come at a price: Forgetting the mercies of their Sovereign God, the Israelites would arrogantly attribute their success to their *own effort and ability* — much like humanists today.

God reminded them through His prophet,

When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today;

lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery [spiritual darkness today] (8:10-14).

God then reviews for the Israelites the many kindnesses He performed to protect and sustain them during their forty wilderness years, “*that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end*” (8:16).

What was the purpose for God testing His people to produce in them a humble

dependence on Him? To forestall an outcome of arrogant *independence*, and to remind them that His mercies to them were His *affirmation* of the covenant He made with their forefathers:

Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day (8:17,18).

Finally, God warns the Israelites of His awesome, loving jealousy as *their God*, and the consequences of blending heathen ways and practices with the command to heed ONLY His voice:

And it shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God, and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God (8:19,20).

Our God started by telling His people that that He is indeed a righteous disciplinarian, just as fatherhood demands. Clearly recognizing the evil propensities of man's sin nature, He warned them in advance of where their sin-based hearts would lead them after they entered the land He'd set apart for them.

Complacent people who are satisfied in the physical realm may forget from Whose hand this provision has come. They take for granted that the same level of prosperity their parents enjoyed will be theirs as well.

And those who refuse to obey God in the manner His Word calls for or who resist serving His interests and purposes are susceptible to *idolatry* — to creating a “god” who pleases their own sense of what a deity should be like. That's what you see in congregations that preach toleration for that which *blatantly defies Scriptural truth*.

Let's summarize what God is saying in this passage, for its warning not only applies to the Israelites but to us today:

1. God makes clear that He disciplines the disobedient (Hebrews 12:5-11).
2. God warns them of the transgressions their sin nature will lead them into (James 1:13-15).
3. God declares the consequences of disobedience and spiritual adultery (Genesis 2:17; Romans 8:13a).

By the 7th century BC, the Israelites of Jeremiah's day had lost all sense of dependence on God. Morally corrupt, the people followed their leaders' example in decadence and idolatry.

Yet the spiritual leaders were “religious” to the extreme, going through precise forms of practice yet devoid of any fear of their righteous God. Having no reverence for His holy law, the priests managed a religious system that precluded any regard for the Most High.

[God laments]: *“The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me, And the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that did not profit [idols]” (Jeremiah 2:8).*

- It didn't even bother God's people that He was no longer in their midst. No one asked, "*Where is the Lord?*" The God Who through His *shekinah* glory guided their ancestors across the desert had long since departed.
- The priests, devoid of righteous fear of God, failed to see that their *own sin* violated God's righteous requirements in the Law. That tolerated sin kept Him from manifesting Himself.
- Instead of leading the people to repent, the priests set up man-made religious expressions that made the people *feel good* about their religious practice, yet had no foundation in God's Word.
- Even the prophets no longer sought God, but instead turned to false gods and prophesied for *personal gain and popular acceptance*.

For Judah and for us today, when repentance is absent, man-made religious expression increasingly reflects a man-pleasing sense of spirituality. Yet hear the pain of God's heart as he cries out against their blatant faithlessness:

'Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But My people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,' declares the LORD.

'My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken Me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water' (Jeremiah 2:11-13).

With neither fear of God for His holy awesomeness nor love for Him in His tender mercy and loving kindness, Jeremiah's contemporaries forsook the glory of the Lord's presence.

Think about that for a moment. Think about how that makes our Lord *feel*. Do you think God will just turn away and let His people commit this horrible transgression against Him? NO!!! First, He will *warn* them. Then He will *discipline* them if they don't repent.

But His people *rejected Him*. Forsaking His law and His voice (9:13), they refused to repent and turn away from walking "*according to the stubbornness of their own hearts and after the Baals*" (9:14).

Failure to repent for sinning against *His commands* is to *reject God*. The Sovereign Lord describes their willful rejection: "*They have turned their backs to Me and not their faces*" (Jeremiah 2:27). While they contented themselves with outward signs of belonging to God through circumcision and going through religious motions, these people *refused to circumcise their hearts* and walk in obedient trust in His ways.

Having strayed from the righteous path God had established, both leaders and followers walked with misplaced confidence in their own ineffectual, "broken" religious system.

We'll come back to this in a later section, but we want to ask you this:

Can the 23,000 competing denominations in Christendom today be a sign of how broken we are?

Is God's warning as much for us as for Judah? "*Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the LORD your God when He led you in the way?*" (Jeremiah 2:17).

Their deliberate idolatry brought severe consequences upon the entire nation. In this next passage, allow your heart to read in terms of the tone God must have intended:

'Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of Me,' declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty (Jeremiah 2:19).

Our long-suffering God sent messengers time and again with warning to His beloved to repent. Yet they capitalized on His delay and lost all sense of holy fear — much like the callous disregard of His profound awesomeness today among both the religious and the worldly.

Lest you think that “fear of God” was an Old Covenant matter, pay attention to Jesus’ admonition to His disciples: ***“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”*** (Luke 12:5). The same God Who overflows with loving mercy also commands the deepest reverence and yes, fear!

How many people do YOU know who shake their heads and then shrug at the calamities sent by our God to get our attention? The catastrophic earthquakes, the lightning-ignited fires, the devastating tornadoes, the disastrous hurricanes — these are but a bowshot from our mighty yet merciful Lord to quicken hearts to humble themselves and call upon Him in deep repentance.

This same motive prompted God to stir His people to recall past chastisement and to repent before the army of destruction was at their gate. Yet in their pattern of determined resistance, each time they “shot the messenger”.

In vain I have struck your sons; They accepted no chastening. Your sword

has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion (Jeremiah 2:30).

How painful it must be for Someone who loves His people so much to have to speak these words to those on whom He had specifically set His affection (Deuteronomy 10:15). But God *would not set aside His holiness* to entertain their sin.

According to our Lord, prophetic blood had been shed since the world was established (see Luke 11:50) — yet the response had all too often been the same: denial of sin, and violent reprisal against the messenger.

Then as now, all but a righteous remnant close their ears to the parameters that walking in relationship with God calls for. The accusation from Jesus against those who discounted prophetic warnings and refused to humble themselves in repentance still stands today:

They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them. But [the dead rich man] said, *‘No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’* But he said to him, ***‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead’*** (Luke 16:29-31; see also Luke 13:34).

You may wonder how the people of ancient Israel as well as those who even saw Jesus in person could be so hard-hearted toward God. But remember, every human being is born with a *sin nature* — a powerful innate force for evil that strives against God and His ways.

Whenever you habitually give way to sin as the Israelites did, your heart hardens to mask over any thought of repentance. You then become deluded in your

evaluation of both your own spiritual condition as well as God's holy character, as Jeremiah's audience did:

You say, 'I am innocent; He is not angry with me.' But I will pass judgment on you because you say, 'I have not sinned' (2:35).

It doesn't matter if you've been taught that grace excuses any sin you choose to commit. If you refuse to confess before Him and turn from that sin, you've offended our Father. Our holy and righteous God can become so displeased by failure to repent that He **"sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie"** (2 Thessalonians 2:11).

We'll touch on this again later, but consider what happens to those who were once indwelt by the Spirit but have chosen to walk away from our God in defiant unrepentance:

*For in the case of those who **have once been enlightened** and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made **partakers of the Holy Spirit**, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and **then have fallen away**, it is **impossible to renew them again to repentance**, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and **put Him to open shame** (Hebrews 6:4-6).*

We want to conclude this section with this thought for you to consider:

When people fail to repent, they will become deluded and set up a religious system that suits them. They may use the Bible as reference for their false position, but they will NOT repent.

Their religious system is a delusion of their own making—a broken cistern. This is the fruit of failing to repent and seek God. And, if your religious practice isn't based on the Hebraic foundations of God's Word, you are embracing a delusion.

You may be thinking that these prophetic words are too strong: "You're citing Older Testament situations. God doesn't deal with His children that way any longer." But consider Paul's reminder that the consequences the Israelites incurred could happen to us as well!

*Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did... These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, **be careful that you don't fall!*** (1 Corinthians 10:6,11,12).

The historical events and God's dealing with His people as recounted in the Older Testament are as pertinent to us today as they were for the Israelites: **"I the LORD do not change.... Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"** (Malachi 3:6a; Hebrews 13:8).

Don't even entertain the thought that God has altered His character and ways over the centuries to suit humanity's sentiments. HE NEVER CHANGES! Don't try to appease your sin nature and redefine Him in a way that varies from His Word. The long-suffering Lord Who disciplined the unrepentant Israelites does the same with us if we walk their path:

*If we **deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of***

*the truth, **no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment** and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

*Anyone who rejected the law of Moses **died without mercy** on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man **deserves to be punished** who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has **treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant** that sanctified him, and who has **insulted the Spirit of grace?***

*It is a **dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God** (Hebrews 10:26-31).*