

# The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 7:1-8:3

Topic

The people of Judah are so deep into their sin that at one point God tells Jeremiah to not even pray for them

Title

*“Don’t Pray for Me, Jeremiah”*

## Introduction

Christians have made popular certain catchy phrases. See if you can finish these four:

1. “Christians aren’t perfect... (just forgiven).”
2. “God said it. I believe it.... (That settles it).”
3. “Get right or... (Get left).”
4. “Christianity isn’t a religion - it’s a... (relationship).”

I’ve often told people “Christianity is not a religion - it’s a relationship.” It’s true; but it’s not complete.

You cannot earn or enter into a relationship with God by observing any religion or religious activities. But *after* you have received the Lord, the apostle James says there *is* a pure and undefiled “religion.”

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

James 1:27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

James was (and is) addressing believers. He indicated there was a positive, “pure and undefiled religion,” and that there was what we might call a ‘poor’ religion. From a read-thru of the entire letter we can summarize what James meant like this:

- Yours is a ‘poor’ religion if you are observing outward forms of worship and Christian disciplines but are avoiding doing what is right and are even doing what is wrong by being involved in sin.
- Yours is a “pure religion” if your outward behavior and activities are the genuine result of the control and leading of God.

Our text in the Book of Jeremiah is an Old Testament example of this same situation. The people of Judah thought themselves very religious; but theirs was a poor and defiled religion rather than a pure and undefiled one.

Maybe we can glean some insight from their failure on how to stay pure in our religion and therefore honor our relationship with the Lord.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 There Is A Poor Religion That Disgraces Your Relationship With Jesus, and #2 There Is A Pure Religion That Graces Your Relationship With Jesus.

#1 There Is A Poor Religion  
That Disgraces Your Relationship With Jesus  
(7:1-15; 7:20-26; 7:32-8:3)

Scholars call chapters seven through ten Jeremiah’s “Temple Sermon.” You see why in the first four verses.

Jeremiah 7:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,  
Jeremiah 7:2 "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!'"

Jeremiah 7:3 Thus says 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 7:4 Do not trust in these lying words, saying, 'The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.'

During the reign of King Josiah the Temple at Jerusalem, which was Solomon's Temple, was restored. Also the Book of the Law was discovered and read aloud. A sort of revival swept through Judah.

I said it was a 'sort of' revival because while the Jews returned to keeping the Sabbath and worshipping in the Temple, they did not *turn* from their worship of idols. Nor, as we will see, did their everyday morals or ethics become transformed. Instead they were, as James might have observed, "spotted [blemished] by the world."

Jeremiah was instructed to stand outside the gate of the Temple and deliver this scathing sermon as folks came with their offerings. According to verse twenty-nine, he was instructed to shave his head as well.

If you've ever seen a crazy street preacher, *that was the kind of thing God asked Jeremiah to do.*

We talked about Christian phrases. The Jews had a phrase, "The Temple of the Lord!" Whenever they heard a message about God's judgment upon them, or had a tinge of inner conviction for sin, they would say, "The Temple of the Lord!", meaning that since His Temple was restored and since God dwelt there in their midst, no matter what they did or didn't do He would defend them for the sake of His own honor.

Jeremiah 7:5 "For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor,  
Jeremiah 7:6 if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt,  
Jeremiah 7:7 then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

The Jews were practicing a poor religion, going through the motions of outward rites and rituals, while ignoring the things that mattered most to God.

Their treatment of the poor and oppressed is very reminiscent of what James wrote in his letter to Christians. The Jews had the kind of poor,

defiled religion James attacked as hypocrisy. Relationship should result in pure religion.

Jeremiah 7:8 "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit.

Jeremiah 7:9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know,

Jeremiah 7:10 and then come and stand before Me in this house which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'?

Jeremiah 7:11 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," says the LORD.

God looked at them as if they were a band of “thieves” who were holed-up in their supposedly impregnable stronghold after pulling a job. Think Hole in the Wall from *Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid* - except that these Jews were not likable scoundrels who didn't really harm anyone. They were wicked.

The Lord listed just a few of their regular, daily behaviors - “steal, murder, commit adultery,” etc. We may not like to read them, but there are lists of sins in the New Testament as well.

Writing to the believers at Corinth, the apostle Paul said,

1 Corinthians 6:9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,

1 Corinthians 6:10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

Paul was talking in this passage to believers about nonbelievers. He said “such **were** some of you.” But it doesn't mean we're off the hook if we practice these things. We don't get a pass.

A few verses later (v18) he says **to believers**, “flee sexual immorality!” He assumed they would know that it was totally inappropriate for them to act the way they used to.

Your salvation doesn't free you to act the way you used to, the way nonbelievers do; **it frees you to act obediently!**

Being a Christian doesn't deliver you **to** sin; it delivers you **from** sin. None of the behaviors Paul listed, or that Jeremiah listed, should *ever* be a part of your relationship with the Lord.

Jeremiah 7:12 "But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.  
Jeremiah 7:13 And now, because you have done all these works," says the LORD, "and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you, but you did not answer,  
Jeremiah 7:14 therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to this place which I gave to you and your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.  
Jeremiah 7:15 And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brethren--the whole posterity of Ephraim.

God reminded them of a historical precedent. Centuries earlier the Jews worshipped God at Shiloh. Because of their sin, God allowed the Philistines to destroy Shiloh. The Jews in Judah had no reason to think God wouldn't do the same to the Temple at Jerusalem.

Skip to verse twenty.

Jeremiah 7:20 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place - on man and on beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground. And it will burn and not be quenched."  
Jeremiah 7:21 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat.  
Jeremiah 7:22 For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices.  
Jeremiah 7:23 But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'  
Jeremiah 7:24 Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.  
Jeremiah 7:25 Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them.  
Jeremiah 7:26 Yet they did not obey Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.

This was God saying He wanted relationship, not religion. He didn't care, ultimately, about their "burnt offerings or sacrifices," but wanted obedience.

Obedience, however, is what proves there *is* a genuine relationship with the Lord and not something surface or formal. When there is obedience, then we will see a religion that is pure and undefiled.

Now skip to verse thirty-two.

Jeremiah 7:32 "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room.

Jeremiah 7:33 The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten them away.

Jeremiah 7:34 Then I will cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride. For the land shall be desolate.

Just outside Jerusalem they had built places of idol worship where orgies were part and parcel of the ceremonies, as were the sacrifices of live infants.

It would become a place of slaughter when God brought the armies of the Babylonian Empire to destroy Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 8:1 "At that time," says the LORD, "they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of its princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves.

Jeremiah 8:2 They shall spread them before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and which they have served and after which they have walked, which they have sought and which they have worshiped. They shall not be gathered nor buried; they shall be like refuse on the face of the earth.

Jeremiah 8:3 Then death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue of those who remain of this evil family, who remain in all the places where I have driven them," says the LORD of hosts.

The Babylonians would desecrate the bones of the deceased, which were kept in ossuaries (bone boxes). Any Jews left alive would wish for death and, it seems, would "choose death," meaning suicide.

Remember all this was being said while the people filed through the Temple gate dressed in their Sabbath-best armed with their offerings and sacrifices to go through the motions of the Jewish religion.

Maybe you find yourself this morning, in some area of your life, at odds with God. *You're here and that's great!* But it has to be more than the outward observance of religion. There must be obedience from the heart - true, pure, undefiled religion.

Look back on the list of things in First Corinthians 6:9 & 10 or Jeremiah 7:9. Are any of them in your life? If so, don't simply say, "I'm the temple of the Lord!" thinking that there will be no consequences.

Repent of your sin. Turn to the Lord from it. He will receive you back. Don't delay. Do it.

#2 There Is A Pure Religion  
That Graces Your Relationship With Jesus  
(7:16-19 & 27-31)

The verses we skipped are whisperings from God directly to and for Jeremiah. They are precious for us to eavesdrop upon.

Jeremiah 7:16 "Therefore 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.

Jeremiah 7:17 Do you not see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?

Jeremiah 7:18 The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger.

Jeremiah 7:19 Do they provoke Me to anger?" says the LORD. "Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces?"

***Don't pray?*** Wow, that's heavy. But let's not go too far with it. Before we say that there are times God says to not pray for people, remember the context in which these comments are found.

God was giving the Jews time to respond and repent to His pleadings through Jeremiah. In fact, *He gave them forty long years!* Whatever He

meant by “do not pray” has to be understood in the context of His love for them, His pleadings to them.

I think it best to understand that God was probably telling Jeremiah to quit praying for their judgment to be averted. It's reasonable Jeremiah would pray that. There's maybe a clue to that in verses sixteen through nineteen. It was as if God was saying, “Jeremiah, how can I avoid judging these people if they keep on with these behaviors? They deserve judgment - even though I am offering them mercy.”

If I'm right, God was simply - but sadly - indicating that Jeremiah ought to pray accordingly.

What can we learn from God telling His servant “do not pray?”

- For one thing, there is a sense in which if I am asked to pray for a nonbeliever, my prayer ought to be that they would get saved - not healed or blessed or anything else. Salvation is always the greatest need. That's why, when four friends lowered a paralyzed man through a roof to be healed by Jesus the Lord started by saying, “your sins are forgiven.”
- For another thing, my prayers for believers ought to always be in the spirit of “Thy will be done, Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in Heaven.” I can't presume to know if God wants someone's situation to change; but I can assume that God wants every believer to endure with His help.

Jeremiah 7:27 "Therefore you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not obey you. You shall also call to them, but they will not answer you.

Jeremiah 7:28 "So you shall say to them, 'This is a nation that does not obey the voice of the LORD their God nor receive correction. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.

Jeremiah 7:29 Cut off your hair and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the desolate heights; for the LORD has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath.'

Jeremiah 7:30 For the children of Judah have done evil in My sight," says the LORD.

"They have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to pollute it.

Jeremiah 7:31 And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart.

Let's focus on a couple of things going on between God and Jeremiah.



Jeremiah was called to a very difficult life and ministry, and from a very young age. In fact, he was promised that his preaching would have no effect on the people. *Yet he obeyed the Lord!*

Things don't always go our way or the way we'd like. Things can get pretty rough, actually. We can grow impatient, dissatisfied, even angry with God. We can go our own way.

Or we can grace our relationship with Jesus by holding firm to the pure religion of simple obedience.

Something else we noted earlier about Jeremiah. He was told to cut off his hair and stand outside the Temple gate and preach. He was what we might call a Jesus-freak.

A few years ago *DC Talk* popularized the title, Jesus-freak. Truth is, though, most of us would like to be considered Jesus-freaks without having to act or look freaky.

There are only two people, really, in our text:

1. The Jesus-freak, and,
2. The Jesus-fake.

Be the freak who honors biblical marriage, who sees their employment as a place of ministry, who is the best student at school, who pushes forward a Christian agenda by wearing witness clothing, carrying a Bible, listening to Christian music and teaching while others are around, who invests time, talent, and treasure in furthering the Gospel of Jesus Christ.