

LEARNING FROM THE PAST IN ORDER TO MAKE A BETTER FUTURE

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The coming of the New Year, in many ways, gives each of us an opportunity to begin anew. If we are going to be better tomorrow than we were yesterday and today, we must learn from our past mistakes. When we do that, we become better equipped to enjoy greater success in the future.

In his book, *The Life of Reason Volume I, Reason in Common Sense*, George Santayana wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” It has been debated by his students over the years, that Mr. Santayana was not indicating that we have a moral obligation to learn from the past, but that he was merely making a statement about how we learn. However, no matter what his original intention was regarding that statement, there is no doubt that if we do not learn from past mistakes, they will be repeated!

Jeremiah, also known as the weeping prophet, was God’s spokesman as He warned the Israelites to cease from their sinful ways and to return to Him. Jeremiah’s writings are laced with emotion and sadness over the downfall of a once great and godly nation. He recorded God’s sadness when He said, “Can a maid forget her ornaments, *or* a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number” (Jer. 2:32). He goes on to say, “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof” (Jer. 5:30-31)? God’s judgment was upon them for their sin was no secret, but why did the Jewish Christians not learn from their own history? Paul, hundreds of years later, would warn Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:2-4). What happened in Israel and to the first century church is not an anomaly that is stuck somewhere in time past, it is with us even today. The reasons for the downfall of Israel, many first century congregations, and of certain congregations of the Lord’s church today are the same.

They did not regard God’s law as binding. Jeremiah rightly accused the Israelite nation when he said, “To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear *is* uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it” (Jer. 6:10). The Jews of Christ’s day did not learn from the past mistakes of their brethren and because of that He said, “**For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and *their* eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them**” (Mt. 13:15). Like those before them, they were not interested in the Word of God, but in the words of men. People want religion, but they want religion that fits their lifestyles instead of patterning their lives after God’s inspired teachings.

One of their many mistakes was that they received error. The Weeping Prophet said, “They have healed also the hurt *of the daughter* of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when *there is no peace*” (Jer. 6:14). Again, those in Paul’s day chose to ignore the fact that accepting false teachings would lead to destruction. He warned the Thessalonian brethren, “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2

Thess. 2:10-11). It is comforting to believe that once salvation is gained it cannot be lost, but that is a lie told by Satan. The apostle Paul said we can fall from grace (Gal. 5:4). It would be easy as alien sinners to simply ask Jesus to come into our hearts in order to receive His grace and salvation. However, it was John who said, “Now we know that God heareth not sinners” (Jn. 9:31).

They refused to be embarrassed by ungodly behavior. Jeremiah asked the question, “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time *that* I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD” (Jer. 6:15). When a society strays far from God, its members become unable to feel the shame of sin any longer and their immoral abominations become expected. The church at Corinth thought they were really doing well when they did not take a stand against an array of sins that had permeated the church. Paul saw it a little differently than they did; he said, “I speak to your shame” (1 Cor. 6:5). We live in a permissive society and for years the liberal factions of our country have insisted, “If it feels good just do it.” We have forgotten how to blush! Paul said, “For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret” (Eph. 5:12); and that is applicable to the world today.

They rejected the only cure for their sins. Jeremiah knew the solution, “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where *is* the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk *therein*” (Jer. 6:16). Because the early Christians had not paid attention to the past, Jude had to exhort them to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3, NKJV). Seven billion people in the world today have rejected Jesus Christ in favor of false prophets!

May all Christians renew their lives to God and strive to be better tomorrow than we are today. Let all of us learn from the past mistakes of those that came before us, and from our own, and bring honor and glory to God and His church, never rejecting the cure that is offered through His Son.