

The people moved from devotion to disinterest — or we might say from love to indifference. They went from a God centered life to a self centered life. In verse 2 they were described as a devoted bride but as time passed, they became indifferent and then rebellious and then defiant. They didn't *hate* God. They just gradually became indifferent to Him. The opposite of love is not hate — it's indifference. They simply drifted to a point where they just didn't care any longer. And so they eventually forgot God completely.

So it is with many so called Christians today. They don't hate God — they just become indifferent to Him. They don't have the time anymore to seek Him on their *own*. It's easier to just trust "leaders" to *tell* them about God. They have "more important" things to do than study God's Word or attend Bible Classes. Many can't even seem to find the time to attend worship. Their life has become wrapped up in sports or money or their hobby or TV shows they can't miss or maybe even their ambitions. *Whatever* it is — it's just not God anymore. How easy the people of Judah slipped into that rut. How easy it is for *us* to slip into that rut. How easy it is to drift from God and then blame *Him* for it. How easy it is to begin to take God for granted.

"They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives? I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable....'" (verses 6 and 7)

The people of Judah *knew* God had done great things for them — but that was a long time ago. All of that was just a memory. They had drifted and "*strayed so far from*" (vs. 5) God that they had forgotten Him completely. When that happens — what is left?

Well, when God is absent from lives, the only thing left is to go out and look for *other* things — other things that might fulfill the inner longings of humankind. The people in Jeremiah 2 had deserted the spring of living water and so they decided to dig their *own* cisterns — but they would not hold water. After deserting the spring of living water, no matter what they did, no matter how many cisterns they dug for themselves, no substitute would be found. *All* would be broken — none would hold water.

But are we all that different? Do *we* dig useless cisterns and if so — what kind? Jeremiah 2 also gives us great insight for possible answers to that question. We'll discuss that in the next issue.

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Dennis and Sherri Owens — Cincinnati, Ohio
diligence@gorfsystems.com — <http://diligence.gorfsystems.com/>*



DILIGENCE

"We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure." — Hebrews 6:11

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Forsaking God

"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 2:13 NIV)

There are many distractions around us today — distractions that draw us away from God. In the previous issue of *Diligence* we mentioned how the culture itself has changed in ways that make it difficult for Christians not only to raise their *children* in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but also to remain faithful themselves. There is a never-ending list of influences that contribute to spiritual blindness today — there are books, toys, movies, teachers in schools, TV shows and even some who *call* themselves "preachers" — just to name a few. Even those who have been faithful followers of God must guard against such distractions that can eventually lead to forsaking God.

Jeremiah, chapter 2 can provide us with tremendous insight concerning the forsaking of God since it deals with the problem Israel had with that very sin. Even a casual read through the Old Testament quickly reveals that the Israelites *repeatedly* drifted from worshipping God only to return to Him when things got really difficult.

Jeremiah 2 is quite a long chapter and space will not allow the inclusion of each verse we reference, so we have included a copy of the New International Version of that chapter in this issue for your convenience. Please refer to that sheet or get your own Bible to read the Scriptures referenced in this issue.

Before going to chapter 2 of Jeremiah, we should first take note that in Jeremiah chapter 1, verse 17 God told Jeremiah to "*Stand up and say to them whatever I command you.*" We also notice then in verse 4 of chapter 2 that all the clans (or families) of Israel shared in the guilt — none could claim that they were not guilty. So with this in mind let's look at chapter 2 of Jeremiah.

In verse 13, God says that His people had committed two sins. First — they had forsaken Him (the spring of living water) and second — they had dug their own cisterns — but they were cisterns that could not hold water. So let's begin by looking at the first of those two sins — forsaking God.

How did God's people forsake Him? Close scrutiny of Jeremiah chapter 2 reveals six things that most likely led to that sin. Let's begin with verse 2 of that chapter.

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It is in verse 2 that Jeremiah mentions the first of those six things — the people had left the devotion of their youth. They no longer loved God as they once had. Many of *us* can identify with this distraction. When we are first baptized, we are “on fire” for the Lord but — as time passes — that fire becomes more like a smoldering ember. The passion that was present in our spiritually youthful days dwindles and we drift from the intense devotion that we once had.

The second thing Jeremiah mentions is in verses 6 and 7 — they stopped seeking the Lord — the Lord had done many wonderful things for them yet they no longer asked “where is the Lord?” But that wasn’t the worst of it. Verse 8 tells us that even their *leaders* failed to seek the Lord. They let the people down by failing to teach the truth of God. They taught what was in the world around them — the philosophies of the day. The leaders (as well as numerous false prophets) were telling the people what they *wanted* to hear. Leadership had betrayed them and taken the “easy road” of not going against what was *pleasing* to the ears of the people. Chuck Smith states in his commentary: “There are so many men today who are so completely liberal in their theology that they no longer really rank as Christians. But still they occupy pulpits and preach their messages to the attended throngs on Sunday morning. But it is no longer the Gospel that they preach. It is no longer the power of Jesus Christ to save a man from sin and the blood of Jesus Christ that redeemed us from our lost estate.” Think about that for a minute. When leaders themselves become corrupt, there’s a good chance the people will just follow. It’s much *easier* to walk on a path made by someone else. It’s *easy* to be a follower. If you go for a walk through the woods, don’t you generally follow the path that’s already there? We seldom forge a *new* one. It’s just *easier* to follow someone *else’s* path. Ceasing to seek the Lord *on our own* is a step toward forsaking Him — following others can so easily cause God to gradually slip away from our hearts. *Each* of us must ask “where is the Lord?” and seek Him daily.

Verse 20 mentions the third thing that led to the people forsaking God — they were rebellious. They openly stated that they would not serve God. They didn’t *want* to know what God said. Their attitude was “I will not do what you tell me to do.” Their lifestyle had become wrapped around everything but God. They trusted their leaders and those leaders were steering them in the wrong direction. They were too busy worshipping the idols to bother seeking God. They had too many places to go, too many things to do, to bother with serving God. They made it clear that they had no intentions of *doing* whatever it was that *God* instructed them to do.

But then look at verse 23 — the fourth thing mentioned! Not only had they rebelled — they didn’t think they had rebelled! They said: “I am not defiled.” Martin Luther once stated that “The ultimate proof of the sinner is that he doesn’t know his own sin.” These people had cut themselves off from the spring of living water and didn’t even *know* they had *done* it!

“[Y]ou say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’” (verse 35)

Isn’t our culture doing the same thing today? It has become *so easy* to change *God’s* standards to fit *our* lifestyle. It’s commonplace nowadays to twist the Bible into saying things it does not say and to ignore the things it *does* say. Anything in God’s Word that society simply doesn’t *want* to accept is discredited and thrown aside — “I will not do what You tell me to do — I will *not* serve You” — and for the most part, our culture sees no problem with that attitude! It’s not even *recognized* as rebellion against Almighty God.

A fifth step that resulted in these people forsaking God was that they tried to blame God. In spite of all they had done, they *argued* with Him. They thought He was *wrong*. They said “I have *not* run after the Baals” (verse 23). They tried to say that God just wasn’t being fair about their indiscretions. But verse 29 and 30 state:

“‘Why do you bring charges against me? You have all rebelled against me,’ declares the Lord. ‘In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction....’”

God *attempted* to correct their choice of direction but it was all in vain. They didn’t even recognize their own sin.

But — when things got difficult — verse 27 — “*when they are in trouble, they say, ‘Come and save us!’*” Well, whadda’ ya’ know about that? They want to treat God as their “errand boy.” They want to follow after *other* gods and refuse to do what God tells them to do but in time of trouble — they want God to help them. “I’m in trouble *now* — so rescue me.” Do any us know people like that? People who seem to only “show up” at church when they have a problem or difficulties in their lives? They want God to help them through a troublesome time and they want the prayers of the congregation. Their backs are against the wall — but they’ve already turned against the very thing that could give them life — nevertheless — they cry out to God — “help us.”

So how did God respond to these people? Verse 28 of Jeremiah chapter 2 —

“*Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.*” [emphasis added]

Does this verse seem to indicate that there *could* come a time when God might say “I’ve had it with you people. Let the gods you’ve been worshipping take care of you? I’m not a genie in a bottle that will appear at *your* command. I will be honored” Could there come a time when God is pushed to the limit — a time when God might no longer *want* to be a part of our lives?

“*Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the Lord your God when he led you in the way?* (verse 17)

And finally the sixth thing mentioned about forsaking God — in verse 32 — they forgot God completely. Notice the gradual deterioration through these six things.