

The Final Stages of Israel's Apostasy
Lesson 2 - A Faithless and Secretive Leadership
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Introduction: Apostasy takes time.

- A. It takes time for the faith of one generation to be rejected by another generation.
 - 1. Satan works through dishonest ways and will deceive you as to his real intent. His most powerful weapons are found within the fellowship of God's people.
 - 2. Someone may have a family history and a personal history of being a leader among the people of God but in reality is something else. **(2 Cor 11:13-15)**
 - 3. Many parents would have had no idea what thoughts and attitudes were being introduced to their children and relatives in the background. **(2 Pt 2:1-2)**
- B. A combination of bitterness and pride are commonly found in dishonest leaders.
 - 1. The reaction of one to the God's word reveals the kind of heart he has. **(Ex 7:1-4)**
 - 2. Men who are self-willed become bitter over time at sound teachers and those who stand with them.
 - 3. Their hardness of heart will often be revealed by looking to share bitterness with others. From Korah to Absalom false leaders can motivate others through inflaming passions over the unfairness of "traditional" brethren. **(Num 16:3-7)**

I. The Leaders of Israel spoke and looked like spiritual men

- A. God intervened in a meeting of Ezekiel and the elders of Israel. **(Ezk 8:1)**
 - 1. They looked and dressed like good men. Ezekiel is about to see as God does.
 - 2. Jesus knew men for who they really were. **(Jn 2:23-25)**
- B. Ezekiel comes into the presence of God. **(8:2-5)**
 - 1. God wants us to know His nature. Our God is fire and light! **(Ezek 16:38; 23:25)**
 - 2. No sin is in Him or can abide in His presence. **(1 Jn 1:5-6)**
 - 3. God now allows Ezekiel to bear a burden, he will see these men as God does!
- C. God's people need honest, mature shepherds that trust in God!
 - 1. A shepherd knows the sheep. **(John 10:3-5)**
 - 2. A leader is concerned for the real welfare of the sheep. What comes first? **(John 10:11-12)**
 - 3. A leader will lead by principle and not by convenience.

II. The Leaders of Israel had a different agenda than what they professed

- A. Ezekiel was able to see what went on behind closed doors. **(Ezk 8:6-12)**
 - 1. The vision is almost like a science fiction movie where he is able to go through walls and see things that the elders did not others to see.
 - 2. They had separated themselves from the people and likely despised them for their ignorant following of traditions. They were the enlightened ones!
- B. These Elders had developed a secret "fellowship."
 - 1. This room was off limits except to the priests. The Elders used it because the people could not see them.
 - 2. Can you imagine this scene? A room filled with idols, the walls covered with idols, and secret worship to idols by the leaders of God's people?
 - 3. The most incredible statement is made about their thoughts about the nature of

God! They did not develop these views overnight.

C. These men had lost the ability to be honest. They had become dishonest politicians only interested in retaining power.

1. Can you imagine how much they hated Jeremiah for his preaching?

(Jer 19:1-4, 14-15)

2. There is no harder audience to teach than those who are “raised in the church” but have hardened their hearts to really listen. **(Ezk 3:5-11)**

3. They tried to silence Jeremiah by intimidation and finally physical torture.

(Jer 38:4-6)

III. The hypocrisy of these Elders caused many to openly practice what they did in secret

A. Hypocrites think that their actions only affect them.

1. Ask anyone who has had a relationship with one like this can bear witness.

2. Satan knows there will be fruit that will abound in others. **(Rom 2:17-24)**

3. Consider the deep commitment that many under these Elders had made to Satan. They did not know God! **(Ezk 8:12)**

B. Jesus knew that this kind of “religion” can be taught and shared.

1. Imagine the stern warning of Jesus himself. **(Lk 12:1-3)**

2. The temptation to become a hypocrite is great. *It is not hard to be one.*

3. The Pharisee’s were very successful in duplicating their character.

(Mt 23:15, 27-28)

C. How did all of the Elders fall in line to these things?

1. Likely there were some who knew the truth but were too weak and cowardly to stand up to the “non-traditional” paths advocated by some.

2. They may have made some “courageous” stands like Pilate and openly stated the truth. Words alone do not constitute a stand! **(Mt 27:23-25)**

D. The people had given into an emotion based worship of idols. **(Ezk 8:13-16)**

1. After experiencing the deeply personal and emotional “weeping for Tammuz” can you imagine how offensive the name-calling preaching of Jeremiah was to them?

2. They likened this new worship as “trivial” changes in their “more mature” understanding of the “freedoms” that they claimed God gave them. **(Ezk 8:16-17)**

3. The common man might say, “the Priest and the Elders who have studied the scriptures more than I have must know what they are doing! After all, these things are done in the temple of God.”

IV. What message could reach such a people?

A. God had Jeremiah preach the perfect message for this people. **(Jer 6:16-19)**

B. The people rejected this “legalistic message” for their own thoughts. God then gave them “the fruit of their thoughts.”

Questions to Consider:

1. How can you know if a leader(s) is corrupt?

2. Why is it difficult for the people of God to rise above its leadership? **(Jer 5:31)**

3. Why does the kind of preaching that God demands become unpopular?

4. What makes the worship of God distinct from false worship?

5. Why would it have been difficult for the common man to see the problems in Israel?