

THE OLD PATHS

Jer. 6:16 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.

We've had a few birthdays this month ... and each birthday you have makes you a little older ☺ ... How would you like to go back to the Fifties ... or the Forties ... or even earlier? ... Looking back sometimes, - with the benefit of 'rose-tinted glasses', - can be a very sentimental journey. ... We didn't have computers in those days, though ... nor mobile phones, nor SatNavs ... How did we manage? ☺

We didn't have men wanting to marry men and women wanting to marry women. We didn't have government-sponsored gambling. We didn't have hoards of people abusing children to the same extent as they do today. Our churches were full, and a great majority were preaching the Gospel, and souls were being saved.

But, can we ever go back? Surely going back is a retrograde step ... and it is bad for society. Well, of course, I wouldn't like to go back to using a typewriter ... and I wouldn't like to back to using a car with the old heavy steering ... and I wouldn't fancy having to wrench the engine with the old starter handle! But, however, I would love to be living in times when our country new God's blessing and His favour. I'd love to be preaching in the church sanctuary ... packed full of people, as once it was. For that reason, I'd love to go back.

It makes me sad when I read such news this about an annual series of meetings that began with something called "celebratory worship". What other kind of worship are you supposed to have?!! Have we become so sophisticated nowadays we have formulated different kinds of worship? ... These people also talked with great excitement about "free fruit giveaways" [*i.e. the fruit of the Spirit*]. ... No, we need to go back!

I want to take you back to a man who was not keeping up with his times. He was out of step with the religious establishment that his society had produced. Nevertheless, he told them, 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.

What was Jeremiah alluding to? What was so special about the ‘old paths’? Surely, the ‘old paths’ had been so well-trodden it was time to dig them up and lay ‘new paths’? These ‘old paths’ were so worn the people did not want to tread them anymore. These new paths, on the other hand, were more pleasing to the eye, more comfortable to walk on, more up-to-date ... so they were getting rid of all the ‘old paths’. ... What ‘old paths’ were the people of Israel deserting? ... What ‘old paths’ had the people of Israel *already* deserted?!

THEY HAD FORGOTTEN GOD

“No!” they would argue, “We have not forgotten God!” ... and they would take you up to the beautiful temple Solomon built, they would take you up the steps at the top of which were the magnificent pillars of Jachin (on the right) and Boaz (on the left) and in through the ornate entrance. ... They would show off to you the absolute beauty of the splendour, and it was all being so well-kept, - they were so proud of it.

They would point out to you how busy all the priests were, and they would try to explain to you the duties of some of those priests ... and they would tell you where they stood on a particular day in all their finery, and raise their hands, and praise God. They would point upwards to the marvellous ceiling; they would direct you ahead to the front of the temple ... to the next set of steps ... up to the beautiful veil, beyond which the presence of Jehovah came down into the Holy of Holies.

They would boast of how filled the temple would be on the Sabbath day, - you would hardly have room to move. They were so proud of their history, and the magnificence of this wonderful building.

On the way in, though, they would have hustled you past a man standing on his own. He was a man, - in the open-air, - with an outdated message that made no sense to the modern, up-to-date Jew. His message was, *Jer. 7:2 Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. 3 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. 4 Trust ye not in lying words.*

The man’s name was Jeremiah and he was preaching an old message, *ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.* But he was so out-of-touch and so out-dated. ... “Look around you”, your guide would say, “Look at the people standing here, look at all the people coming in ... Aren’t we doing so well?!”

Nevertheless, Jeremiah, - the man outside of it all, - brought them a message from God, 7:13 And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; 14 Therefore will I do unto this house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh. 15 And I will cast you out of my sight ... and he kept on preaching it, because it was the Lord's message and he had no option *but* to preach it.

You see, they had *so* forgotten God. They no longer could remember what true worship of Jehovah actually was. ... Celebratory worship, what kind of worship was that?! ... They could not understand, - or, am I giving them too much grace? – perhaps it is more correct to say, they would not understand ... because they must have had some inkling as to what Jeremiah was talking about, 7:9 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; 10 And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? 11 Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? *Behold, even I have seen it, saith the LORD.*

They had forgotten God. They were trusting in a form of religion that had replaced Him. ... They had exchanged Him for a god of their own imaginations ... wrapping him up in the dressing of all the religiosity of the temple. ... And what was Jeremiah's message to them, Jer. 6:16 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. ...

Then, in chapter 18 Jeremiah was told to bring them another message, ... God in His merciful grace gave these undeserving people one more opportunity, v.11 Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. 12 And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart. **And how did the Lord reply?** v.15 Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up; 16 To make their land desolate, and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head. 17 I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy.

Did the Lord's words make any difference to them? No, not a bit! v.18 Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.

Jeremiah called upon them to 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. ... You see, **they had forgotten God** and they were stubbornly refusing *the old paths!*

THEY HAD FORSAKEN HIS WORD

God's Word was no longer cherished, - it was to the priests and to the 'counsel from the wise' (18:18) the people turned. It was the 'revised version' they were using, - the version 'improved upon' by the priests to suit the people! God's Word no longer had a capital 'W'! God's Word could be changed and adapted for their itching ears. He was being openly mocked ... without even the people realising it. ... Imagine trifling with God ... Imagine referring to our blessed Holy Spirit in terms of "free fruit giveaways"! ... What would Jeremiah have said!

But all the demanding portions in Moses' law had been updated, even omitted! ... You had the freedom, - in Jeremiah's day, - to interpret it in whatever way you chose, *because you were sincere*. At the very beginning, and throughout his prophecy, Jeremiah cherished the Word of God. It was altogether precious to Him. He could not set it aside in order to facilitate modernism and liberalism.

He *needed* the Word of God to *see through* the antics of the temple priests, - that was how he knew they were false. He *measured* them with God's Word. And he preached the Word of the Lord to these Israelites, 2:7 I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. 8 The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit. 9 Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead.

Is God pleading today? Is He pleading when many are so prone to set aside and forsake the Word of God in favour of modern-day religion? For all his preaching the Word of God, the Lord told Jeremiah, 7:17 thou shalt speak all

these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee. 28 But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the LORD their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth. ... God instructed him he was not to stop preaching, ... he was not to update and fall in behind the people's desires ... and pretend they were all the same!

Over and over again God gave him the same message ... He never changed the message ... and the message was to *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.*

Do you know what God does when His voice is continually rebuffed? ... He stops speaking! 44:11 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will set my face against you for evil, and to cut off all Judah ... 29 And this shall be a sign unto you, saith the LORD, that I will punish you in this place, that ye may know that my words shall surely stand against you for evil. ... What a dangerous predicament ... but one that can be avoided!

You see, the people in Jeremiah's day were in such a hurry to go *forwards* they were travelling without God, for they would not go backwards ... to ***the old paths!*** They stubbornly would not *Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein.* ... And even though the times looked good to *them*, God's judgement was already upon them! **They had forgotten God. They had forsaken His Word** ... and the consequence?
...

THEY HAD FORFEITED THEIR PRIVILEGE

God could not have been any more gracious to them. He could not have given them any more opportunities to repent and return to Him and travel down the 'old paths' again. The 'old paths' were the only way forward! Man's ways were dragging them back and away from all the privileges God had blessed their nation with. ... "No! We are going forward! Jeremiah, we are leaving all that you tell us about behind. We've had enough of it and we don't want it anymore!" And God appealed to them ...

The God Who brought them up of captivity in Egypt, and through the wilderness, and into the land flowing with milk and honey ... the same God Who blessed them with faithful men like Moses, Samuel and David ... *He appealed to them to turn!* ... 3:1 thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD. ... 3:12 Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the

LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. ... 3:22 Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings ... 18:11 return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

They had forgotten the privilege of knowing God. Out of all the nations, the nation of Israel was chosen by Jehovah as His own special, unique and prized possession ... and yet they exchanged it. They had forsaken the privilege of His Word and chosen the words of men ... words that contradicted the precious Word of God, spoken through the faithful prophets. They had also forfeited all the privileges God had so wonderfully blessed them with ... and they chose the gospel of the people round them rather than the Good News from the mouth of God.

The Gospel of Sovereign and saving grace, - preached by the apostles, and handed down through the Church Fathers, travelling along the centuries through faithful men who upheld it in the pulpits, along through the Reformation period and up to the modern times ... - this same Gospel of God's Sovereign and saving grace has never been changed by God. It is the same message ... and you will find throughout all the centuries God's chosen way to make it known is to Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. 3 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; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (II Tim. 4:2).

There is only one Gospel, - it is the Gospel that Jesus Christ saves! He died on the cross of Calvary, and He rose again from the dead ... and He is very God of God! It is a privilege we can never afford to forfeit, and it never needs to be changed or to undergo any 'up-dates'. Do anything with it and you're in danger of saying to God His message is old-fashioned, and it's lost its power! No, stand on such faulty ground and you stand in disobedience to God and His Word.

Yes, sadly, the vast majority of the children of Israel fell under the wrath of God's judgement ... but God did another wonderful thing to demonstrate His glory, ... 6:9 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine ... 23:3 I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. ... 31:7 For thus saith the LORD; Sing with gladness for Jacob,

and shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye, and say, O LORD, save thy people, the remnant of Israel.

Out of all the people, He kept unto Himself a faithful remnant ... As long as this earth remains not even the gates of hell will silence the true people of God, - not even if every occupant of Hell, and every unbeliever, and every demon would march against the Church. The Word of God promises us, *Rev. 17:14 the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful. ... We are on the undefeatable side of the undefeatable God!*

CONCLUSION

Jeremiah says, 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 ... The old paths.

We are here to do God's bidding, and we must be careful and to be sure we carry out His bidding His way. ... Never mind the plans and programs of others, never mind being told we are 'behind the times'. I trust the Holy Spirit makes it clear to us through His Word it is God with Whom we must keep in step, not man or his latest innovations. It is God's work and He knows the best way to get the best results, and He sets out that way in His Word. The people in Jeremiah's day ... and in our day also ... many have **forgotten** God and **forsaken** His infallible, inerrant and most precious Word. They have **forfeited** their privilege in being the people of the Gospel of Christ, ... but God reminds us in His Word, I Pet. 2:9 ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: 10 Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

We praise and bless the Name of God Who continues to work amongst us and, - I trust, - gives each of us the spirit of expectation. Yes, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for *the old paths* ... Amen.