

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.

I enjoy studying the prophets, - the times in which they lived, the issues they dealt with, and the prophecies they uttered. Common to them all was the longing for a fresh and powerful outpouring of God, **Hab. 3:2** O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years.

Coming at the same subject from a different perspective was Jeremiah who confronted the people, **Jer. 6:16** 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' related to the times when Name was respected and revered. Those former generations were by no means perfect, and yet they had an awe for the Name of God. As the years passed, though, the 'old paths' had been replaced by the new. Centuries-held traditions, based upon the Law of Moses, were abandoned ... and those who espoused them were ostracised and shunned. ... Instead, the 'new paths' were upheld as the way forward ...

THEY HAD FORGOTTEN GOD ... They would have denied that, of course, ... and they would have taken you to the beautiful temple Solomon built in Jerusalem, they would climb the steps with you, 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 point out how busy the priests were in tasks not mentioned in the Law of Moses, and they would explain to you some of their most modern duties ... They would tell you about new practices the priests had introduced from some of the other religions, and how they had 'syncretised' it into their worship. ('Syncretism' is a *nice* word that explains how they had adapted paganism into the house of the Lord.)

They would point upwards to the marvellous ceiling; they would direct you to look to the front of the temple ... to the set of steps ... up to the beautiful veil, behind which was the Holy of Holies.

They would boast of how filled the temple would be on the Sabbath day, and on the feast days ... They were proud of their history, and boastful of this magnificent building.

On the way in, though, they would have hustled you past a man standing on his own ... for nobody wanted him there. He was bellowing out antiquated ‘gibberish’ the contemporary Jew preferred to forget. His message was *embarrassing*, **Jer. 7:2** Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord ... **Jer. 6:16** ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein. But, no-one was paying him any heed. ... “Look around you”, your guide would say, “Look at the people coming in ... Aren’t we doing well?!”

That wasn’t Jeremiah’s analysis though, for he told them, **Jer. 7:13** 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 ... But nobody was paying the least bit of attention. And yet, Jeremiah kept on preaching what the Lord had told him to say.

You see, they had *so* forgotten God. They could no longer remember what true worship of Jehovah was ... and they were calling good evil, and evil good, **Jer. 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. ... Their sense of morality and what was right and wrong was destroyed ... it had been shattered and ruined, first and foremost by those religious priests in the temple **Jer. 6:31** The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means ... and the people were all too happy to follow them, and my people love to have it so.

Then, in chapter 18 Jeremiah was told to give them another opportunity, - God’s grace is more than we deserve ... **Jer. 18:11** Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 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. ... Come back to Me, and I’ll forgive you ... You are My people ... **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 that was it! ... God will not be mocked, not even by His own people, for whatever they sow, they will inevitably reap (Gal. 6:7) ... And He judged them, **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! They were so determined, ¹⁸ Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; ... we can't get at God, but we'll get at God through 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.

... And then we see what happens next ... When a nation abandons God, it abandons His Word ... and when it abandons His Word, they replace it with their own, - their own laws, their own regulations ... they change what was normal into the abnormal, and rout out every vestige of God from their society! ... **They had forgotten God and THEY HAD FORSAKEN HIS WORD.**

... His Word which had been the backbone of their laws was stripped away, and no longer meant anything to them. This was how the 'eminent scholars' of the day was leading them ... but Jeremiah warned the people, **Jer. 23:16** *Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.* ... Here is the kind of thing they were saying, God had gone away off somewhere, and it was up to them to 'carry on' ... to which God replied, ²³ Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off? ⁴ Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD. ²⁵ I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name

Nevertheless, the people turned to the priests because they preferred what the priests were saying ... rather than what Jeremiah, the servant of the Lord, was saying, **Jer. 18:18** said [*the prophets*], 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. It was a 'revised version', - the version 'approved' by the priests to suit what the people wanted! God's Word no longer had a capital 'W'! He was being openly mocked ...

Jeremiah, though, *needed* the Word of God to understand the antics of the apostate priests, and that was how he knew they were false. He *measured* them with God's Word which reminded them, **Jer. 2:7** I brought you into a plentiful country [*at least six hundred years earlier*], 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.

Notice the Lord's emphasis ... ⁹ Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead ... i.e. He would withhold His judgment for two more generations, - He is patient. He is gracious ... but there comes the time when He will take no more, ²¹ Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me? ... ³¹ O generation, see ye the word of the LORD.

And then the time arrived when God would take their provocation no longer, and He said to Jeremiah, ^{7:27} Therefore 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. ... Terrible times were coming ... A New Testament Jewish writer wrote, **Heb. 10:3** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ... and very soon, these inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea were to find it out!

Do you know what God does when His grace is continually rebuffed? ... He stops speaking, and that ushers in the darkest of days, **Jer. 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 ... To this generation He said, I'm getting rid of you! ... And He told them how He would use a pagan king, 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. ... This could have been avoided if they had heeded God's message! But instead, they had **forgotten God, and 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 opportunity to return to the 'old paths', for the 'old paths' were the only way forward! Man's ways were dragging them away from the privileges God had blessed their nation with, **Jer. 3:1** return again to me, saith the LORD ... ¹² Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD ... ²² Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings.

Don't you see it happening around us today? The exact same falling away among God's professing people, as in the times of Jeremiah and the prophets.

God's Word changed. His ways abandoned. His people, - His *true* people, - are being criminalised ... And what happened to Jeremiah? He was lambasted by the clergy, jailed by the king, exiled to Egypt, where he died.

But let's not despair ... it is not all over because God had another message He wanted the people to hear, **Jer. 29:4** Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, unto all that are carried away captives, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem unto Babylon ... **11** For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. **12** Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. **13** And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. **14** And I will be found of you, saith the LORD: and I will turn away your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the LORD; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive. ... God would *never* abandon His people for He has for them a glorious future ... **Jer. 31:9** They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble: for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn ... **11** For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. **12** Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. **13** Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, both young men and old together: for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. **14** And I will satiate [*fill, replenish*] the soul of the priests with fatness [*abundance*], and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, saith the LORD.

Don't give up on God and what He has promised! In His Word He shows us the bigger picture, with each detail intricately drawn according to His plan, for His glory. ... Yes, as it seemed in the days of Jeremiah, ... the world was getting everything its own way, but God is still in control, **Jer. 32:17** Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee.

Let's keep to the 'old paths', - the tried and tested God-authenticated way, - for He has surely promised we shall find rest for our souls. Amen.