

# Old Paths

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[ 0 : 00 ] The passage of Scripture that, and I'll say this to you, this is not the first time that this particular passage comes to my mind this time of the year.

It's in Jeremiah, Jeremiah chapter 6. Jeremiah 6.16. And I'm not going to read it yet. I'm going to kind of read it and maybe comment a little bit along the way. And this is not going to be a long kind of teaching thing.

It's more devotionally. But I think that we can clearly see from this particular passage how it would apply to where we are right now as a nation, as a culture.

I would add some qualification here because this passage was not written for the United States. It was written for really the southern kingdom, Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel.

[ 1 : 17 ] And Jeremiah is prophesying to the southern kingdom. And that's what we have here in Jeremiah. So it's God's chosen people, the Jews, that this passage is immediately for or intended for.

And yet the application of it, I think it's permissible to apply it to our own lives, our own nation, our own culture.

And I think when I start to read it here, I think you'll see that pretty clearly. And again, this probably to most of us here is a very familiar passage.

It's very profound to me. I don't know how many years ago it was that I was reading through Jeremiah and my ignorant life in those days. I knew very little bit about the Bible or at least had matured much spiritually years ago.

And it came upon this verse and it stuck with me. I've never forgotten it. So let me begin by reading it. Verse 16, Thus says the Lord. All right, so we know who's speaking here.

[ 2 : 27 ] Okay, Jeremiah is the mouth. But this is God speaking. And that's what prophets did. You know, they said, Thus says the Lord. And I would say that modern day prophets are to do the same thing.

You know, Thus says the Lord. Now, that's not, you know, when you hear a preacher today say something like that. He's not an egomaniac, you know, that I'm the Lord.

No, it's the Lord speaking. And this is what he says. And so here's what he said. But stand in the ways and see or look and ask for the old paths where the good way is and walk in it.

Then you will find rest for your souls. I'm going to stop right there. Because what comes next is what obviously they said.

And the very reason why the southern kingdom, Judah, eventually fell. And the northern kingdom had already fallen, already been conquered by the Assyrians.

[ 3 : 36 ] And now the southern kingdom is going to be conquered, led away, most of them captive, by the Babylonians. And so what comes next is kind of the epitaph, the reason why God judged them.

I'm going to read a little bit further here in a minute. But I want to take this block of the passage first and just point out to you the verbs. I find myself doing that quite often when I study scripture.

And that kind of comes out in my preaching because I want to point you to maybe some key things in a passage that help us understand. And some key words in the passage that create the biggest impact in our lives.

And verbs are almost always important. Can you imagine the English language without verbs? What could you communicate without verbs?

And nouns are important, but verbs are crucial. Those are the action words of our language. And so there are four of them in that one verse that I just read.

[ 4 : 53 ] And you could pick them out yourself. What would be the first one? Stand. All right, stand. Standing obviously requires stopping.

Stop here. Take stock. Take pause. Here's Jeremiah, really God, saying to his beloved people. In fact, it is really his grace that he would even give them an opportunity. There's a glimmer of opportunity here.

A little hope. Maybe the judgment that's coming could possibly be averted. I don't know. But this is a gracious thing to say.

Stop just a minute. And don't you want to, you know, certainly on the national scale, when we think about our culture and we kind of, we can see the direction we're going.

[ 6 : 00 ] And I would say in the last year particularly, we have been, I mean, just plunging down in a direction that is destructive and appalling, really.

All you have to do is just kind of reflect back over the last few years and think, wow, in the world, you know, rapidly. Now, as long as I've lived, well, I guess as long as I've been spiritually conscious, you know, this has been obvious and observable, you know, the way our nation has been going.

And we kind of reach a level and we, you know, and then we kind of get used to that. And then we go a little deeper and we kind of get used to that. And we go a little deeper, you know, more immorally. And we get kind of level off, get used to that, you know, like the proverbial frog, you know, cooking in the slowly boiling water.

But, you know, and that's been going on all of our lives if we've been conscious of it and the thing most of us have. And yet in the last few years, it's just incredible.

And you just want to want to say, well, just stop here a minute. Are you paying attention? You know, take a look at where you are. But he's really not so much saying stop and look where you are.

[ 7 : 20 ] That's implied. He says stand still. Stop a minute. And then the second verb is, in some versions, it's look.

In fact, that's a better word, really. In this translation, it's see. So stop a minute here. Take a look at something.

You know, look. You know, it's not just in relation to our culture in general, but even people we know. I have something going on in my family right now, my extended family that, you know, they live, you know, hundreds of miles away from us.

And I would love to just say, would you just stop a minute and take a look at this? Some decisions that they have made, some things that are going on that are just appalling.

And you want to just grab them by the shoulder and say, would you just stop a minute and take a look at this? But what are we to look at? Look and then the third verb is ask.

[ 8 : 31 ] Ask for the old paths. Now, that is almost, you know, ridiculous to our culture. In fact, usually the objection to what we preach and teach and how we say the Bible wants us to live, the objection usually is, well, that's old.

You know, that's outdated. The Bible's outdated. You know, Christianity, you know, traditional Christianity, the kind of Christianity that our country was built upon. That's old-fashioned, you know. And so the very idea that we would stop and look and ask for the old paths. But it's not just any path, is it? We're to walk, and that's the fourth verb.

But the path that we're to ask for is the good way. And, of course, that is God's way, obviously. It's God's way according to His word, according to His will. And wouldn't it be an incredible thing if we had that kind of revival, a kind of spiritual awakening in our nation, even in many of our churches, in our own lives?

[ 9 : 58 ] Because, I mean, this speaks to every single one of us. And we're to some degree or another. We just have kind of just lost sight of the right way, the good way, the old way, the path that God has laid.

And so how do we get back on that? We stop and look and ask for that old path. And then, of course, we have to walk in it. So there's the four verbs there.

So Jeremiah, really God, is saying to the people of Judah, the southern kingdom, God's people, God's chosen people, people in Jerusalem and around that area, the area of Judah, you know, very close to the place where the Messiah will, you know, about 500 some odd years later will be born. And he's saying to God's people, stand still, take a look, ask for the old path and walk in it. Walk in it.

I mean, that's so simple, isn't it? And that's what we want our nation to do. Of course, when I say, you know, our nation, the majority of the people who we work with, live here in Bartlesville, the majority of the people who are citizens of this country have no capacity whatever to do what is asked here.

[ 11 : 32 ] Because they're unregenerate. They have no eyes to see the good way. And instead, they reject it. So I guess we should conclude that this message is to be delivered to God's people.

Judgment begins at the house of the Lord. If the church would do this, what difference would that make in our nation?

I think a tremendous difference. And then, of course, the latter part of verse 16 is the saddest part. But they said, we will not walk in it.

Very resolute. We will not walk in it. Also, I said watchmen over you saying, this is verse 17, watchmen, who would they be?

The prophets. God's prophets, God's mouth, God's spokesman. And, of course, these are prophets, Old Testament prophets, in a quite different sense than prophets today.

[ 12 : 44 ] And yet, really the role is the same. We have prophets today, watchmen set on the wall. Of course, it's the illusion of the watchmen on the wall that are keeping watch all around the city looking for approaching danger.

And when they see the approaching danger, then they sound the alarm. Here, I think it's likened to the sound of a trumpet. And so, God said, you know, and this is, again, part of His grace.

And today, too, it's God's grace that He would still have His prophets, His watchmen, who are sounding the alarm because of the approaching danger.

And so, He's saying, listen to the sound of the trumpet. The preachers in the pulpits and the preachers, at least those that are preaching God's Word, that go out over the airways and TV and radio and Internet now, you know, through so many different ways that the message gets out to the people.

And they're sounding the alarm. And we've been doing it for some time. You know, it's not just a recent event that suddenly God's preachers are sounding the alarm.

[ 14 : 11 ] That's been going on as long as I've been alive, I remember. And so, God has done that. That's part of His grace. He's got the watchmen in there sounding the alarm. So, listen to it.

Listen to it in the sense of listen and respond to it. And what's the danger? Well, it's many things. The moral dangers, the spiritual dangers, all of these things, they're going to destroy.

Families are going to destroy a nation. And so, listen. And then it concludes with this similar thing there in verse 16. But they said, we will not listen.

It's just so sad, isn't it? If you think about it. So, I mean, so blatant, so resolute. We will not listen. And then comes the judgment.

Therefore, hear you nations. And know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth. Behold, I will certainly bring calamity on this people.

[ 15 : 20 ] And by the way, the word now is kind of broadcast to the nations. Now, God's not getting ready to judge the nations here. He's getting ready to judge His people.

And He's saying, nations, take notice here. What I'm going to do. And these are my people. And they have turned from me. They will not walk in my way.

Will not listen to my word. And I'm going to judge them. Nations, take a look and see. And watch this. Behold, I certainly will bring calamity on this people.

And then this statement. The fruit of their thoughts. Because they have not heeded my words nor my law, but rejected it. The fruit of my thoughts. Now, that's a little confusing maybe.

Actually, the word thoughts means schemes, plans. You know, things that man has devised in his mind to do.

[ 16 : 24 ] And he's saying they're going to get the fruit of that. It's not what they thought. Not what they expected. Not what they thought they were going to get.

But they're going to get the fruit of it, which is judgment. God's judgment. Calamity. In many different forms. And for Judah, it's going to be an invading army that's going to destroy and pillage and take captive.

And their whole way of life will suddenly just come to a screeching halt. And many will die. And they will suffer. And they'll be led away from their country.

They'll not be able to worship anymore. And all kinds of things. And the reason is because they have not heeded my words nor my law, but rejected it. And God's going to display to the whole world, to the unbelieving world, the pagans, how serious he is about his word.

[ 17 : 29 ] And so, you know, I'm going to stop right there. I'm not going to go any further. And we could go on and find some other parallels with our culture, our nation, things going on here.

The church, the world. But, you know, sharing this tonight, not to make us all feel, oh, boy, new year.

I wanted to kind of feel a little bit better about things. But it really needs to place a burden in our hearts. And, you know, not any one of us can change our country and, you know, make it, you know, seek that old path and walk according to God's word, God's principles.

But we can make those kind of decisions for our own life. And if it affects that kind of change in our families, it can be used by God to do that.

And even extending beyond that to other circles of relationships that we have opportunity to make a difference in. And in our church, we can have a bigger impact on this than we think.

[ 19 : 00 ] In our church, to be a church that stands for God's word and not just enjoys the, you know, the teaching and preaching of it and learning of it, but lives it out in a very obvious way.

Thank you.