

Going Old School
3-Year Bible Reading Plan
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I'm going to encourage you this morning to turn in your Bibles to the book of Jeremiah, Jeremiah there in the Old Testament. If you're not familiar with our Bible reading plan, just go to the middle of your Bible and take a right, eventually you'll get there. He's got 52 chapters so eventually you're going to find Jeremiah. But today we're going to be in chapter 6 and I'm going to warn you in advance, we're going to go back into chapter 2 and 4 as well, but we're going to stay within Jeremiah and you need to understand who Jeremiah was before we read these words today.

Jeremiah is whom we call the weeping prophet. He's the only man that the Lord told not to marry and have a family. He is the one who lamented over Jerusalem. And more importantly, he is the only one of the prophets who didn't just proclaim, "Thus saith the Lord," he actually lived it out. Allow me to explain. We categorize the prophets of the Old Testament into three sections. We call it formally pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic. Let me put that in good old 21st century Southernese here: the mess is coming, the mess is here, and we just got out of the mess. That's what's happening in what we know as the Old Testament. Most of them either warned that it was coming but didn't have to live through it, others actually were living through it and warned in the midst and then there were others warning that, "Let this not happen again." Jeremiah, here we're going about to read in chapter 6, he warned them, "It's coming." He warned them that trouble was on the horizon, and unlike Isaiah and many others who the Lord took home with him before it actually took place, Jeremiah had to live out the consequences of their sin, he had to live out the ramifications of the rebellion, and here in chapter 6 he's given one of those final warnings. He can sense it just like you and I can sense it. There's tension in the air and he does something that I appreciate so much here, in chapter 6 he goes what I like to call old school. Now you hear that phrase a lot of times whether it's in reference to parenting or coaching or academics, we say, "Oh, they're just old school." Can we be honest with ourselves? Usually that is not a term of endearment. Usually that means that pain and affliction is on the horizon. But Jeremiah goes old school on them and he warns them that, "If you do not look back to that which got you to this place, you're in for a world of hurt."

One very simple verse in chapter 6, verse 16,

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.

Jeremiah has this final cry, "We need to go back to the old paths. We need to go back to the God that got us here. We need to go back to that which we were founded upon." Look at the response, "But they would not walk therein." I believe it's at this moment that the lamenting began. He knew that they weren't going to hear the word of the Lord but we can learn from history today, we can look back at the Israelites' failure and we can learn from it.

How do we do so? First, we've got to make some observations and this is where we're going to go back into chapter 2 for just a moment. For the first five chapters of what we know as the book of Jeremiah, he has laid out a case against the Israelites and there's an interesting parallel here, even though there are dozens of statements that are made, dozens of accusations, dozens of commentaries on their ill behavior and improper decision, if you begin to categorize them, you'll notice that they parallel what we know as the 10 Commandments. You know, it's interesting that the Lord has not changed his ways, and though humanity continually finds new ways to rebel against him, really all they are is an old way of rebellion just couched in new language and new manifestations. You go through what we know as these first five chapters and you see them forsaking for other gods, you see idolatry, you see covetousness, you see a dishonoring of those who are in respect, particularly their parents, you see the lying, the killing, the cheating, the stealing, all the things of the famous 10 Commandments. And allow me to remind you the 10 Commandments display to us the totality of our rebellion but they also show us the righteousness of God because he is none of those things.

But I really want to talk to you about the particulars here. Now for those of you that are here in person, we're going to have them listed on the screen, for those of you that are online, they'll be scrolling on the bottom there. I've listed 10 of the statements that are made in regards to their behavior, their decision-making and their lifestyles. Though they're not in the order of the famous 10 Commandments of Exodus 20, you will see that each and every one of these is a very clear and strict violation of those famous 10 Commandments. But for the sake of time today, I just want to focus on two, the first one and the last one.

So in chapter 2, verses 11 through 13, I want to share with you this accusation that is made and I want to draw an eerily particular parallel to our culture today. Verse 11, "Has a nation," and by the way, when you see the word "nation" in the Bible, don't think sovereign state, think people, okay?

11 Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. 12 Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD. 13 For my people have committed two evils;

they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Interesting, has a people, has a group, has a place, have they ever forsaken their gods? This is a fascinating study. This really digs into what we might call anthropology. You begin to go back and you look at cultures and you look at societies and you look at people groups and the one thing that you'll know is this, that they are born, they live and they die, often to a fault, for the gods that they worship, whatever those gods may be.

Notice what it says: they call them gods but they are not gods. Let's draw a parallel to our world today, where are we as a culture 400 to the year after what we know as the Mayflower made it's way across the Atlantic. Now I want you to hear a disclaimer. I in no way and in no shape or fashion believe that those first people who came to this land were Bible-thumping Southern Baptists, but can we just agree they were deists? They believed in God? They believed that the Bible was sacred? And yet we live in a culture today that if you listen to the propaganda, we were established by secular atheists, nothing to do with the holy, nothing to do with God. Take everything that is holy and just throw it out because it never was or should have been here in the first place. Guys, allow me to just implore you, beg you, if you don't believe me, just take a trip. I know we're in a COVID world and it's hard to do so, but we have this wonderful thing called the internet and there's pictures. Go and look at the buildings in our capital. Now I know they're not Bible-thumping Southern Baptists, I understand that, but engraved in the stone are Bible verses, not the writings of secular philosophers. In fact, my son and I had the privilege last year, my youngest son, we went to Boston for a few days and we walked the grounds of Harvard, that great institution of learning. Do you know what we discovered? There are plaques up dedicated to pastors who helped establish it, and there are still buildings today with Scripture engraved on it. Lest you doubt, go to the rotunda of the capital. There are these famous paintings in that building. One of those paintings has a group of explorers kneeling around a Bible praying for God to grant them safe journey, and one of them is the baptism of Pocahontas. Now I understand we weren't Bible-thumping Southern Baptists but if we have a Bible, we're praying and we're baptizing, can we at least agree that we believed in the God who revealed himself through Scripture and was receptive to our communication with him? Can that be at least our baseline?

Has a people ever forsaken their gods? Do you see the parallel? Do you see what's happening in our society today? If we believe what we hear, then those paintings, and they probably will pretty soon are going to be removed. That etching will be filled in. What is the accusation? You have forsaken. You have gone away from that which got you here.

Now let's go to the last one, go to chapter 5, verse 30 and 31. Again for the sake of time, we're not going to go through all of them and you'll understand that because on this one I could camp out for about two hours. Verse 30 and 31, we discover what God says through the prophet Jeremiah. If you want to lay blame, get ready. Here's where you can lay blame.

30 A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land;

By the way, the word "wonderful" doesn't mean good, it just means we wonder at it.
Verse 31,

31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means;
and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?

Now I'm one of those individuals in the room today that I can actually lay claim to this. I can state this because I "wear the shoes" thereof. You want to know where to lay the blame of what happened over 400 years? You want to know why we are now promoting a secular, humanistic, anti-God government? I can tell you who to blame: blame the preachers. Why? Because we bought into the carnality. We bought into the materialism. We bought into the world giving us what we need versus what God said and, "Thus saith the Lord." He said the prophets have prophesied falsely. The priests have done their duty for their only purpose of their own gain. You want to know why the culture is the way the culture is? The culture goes by way of the church and the church goes by way of the pulpit, my friends. When the pulpits become secular, then the culture becomes secular, and we live in a world today where we preach more health, wealth and prosperity than the depravity of our sinful condition and the need of a Savior.

So why would we question what has taken place? Lest I'm gonna let y'all off the hook, notice that statement right toward the end, "But my people, they love it." We're the ones buying the books. We're the ones downloading the sermons. We're the ones showing up to the conferences. We love to hear it. You see, the reason that we're in this predicament, the reason that our culture is kind of at this crossroads, it is so easy to point fingers, it is so easy to talk about people who we've never met in person and say, "Well, if they would and they would and this and that," but at the end of the day the Lord says, "The reason, Israel, you're in this mess is because the pulpit and the pew have gone the way of the materialistic secular world."

So what does he say to do? Go back to the old paths. Well, this is one of those times in life that as a pastor I could take advantage, I could tell you what I think the old paths are, what I think they should be, the problem is that's the same mess we've been in for decades in this culture. So go back to chapter 4 and I want you to hear from the mouth of God what are the old paths. When he says return to the old paths, go back to the way that God called you, what is he saying? And what we're about to read in chapter 4, beginning in verse 1, is he's saying there are certain things we need to do toward God, there are certain things we need to do toward each other. It says,

1 If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the LORD, return unto me: and if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove. 2 And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory. 3 For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and

Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings. 5 Declare ye in Judah, and publish in Jerusalem; and say, Blow ye the trumpet in the land: cry, gather together, and say, Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the defenced cities. 6 Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction.

What is he saying that we need to do? Well, when it comes in our relationship toward God, we need to return, we need to repent, and we need to remove the stuff that has no business in our lives.

Allow me to draw a New Testament illustration, a story that I'm sure most of us are very familiar with. We know him as the prodigal son, a young man who goes to his father, which by the way, in Luke 15 Jesus is telling a parable and the Lord is the dad and humanity is the son. We said, "God, give me my inheritance and I want it now." What does he do? He wastes it. I love what the Bible says, on riotous living. And as soon as the money is gone, as soon as the party has ended, he discovers he's in a mess. He finds himself literally feeding the swine in a puddle of mud. Do you know what the problem is that most of us are swimming in the mud and telling ourselves that it's clean water. Most of us are wallowing with the pigs and saying, "Give me another bottle of perfume so I can make it smell better." But what does he do? He says, "Do you know what? It would be better if I was a servant in my father's house than to keep doing this. I will go to him and beg him just to make me a hired hand."

You know, the beauty of that story is that when he returns he finds the father, he finds the picture of the Lord with his arms open wide to embrace him in the fact that he has returned, he has repented, and he has removed all that mess from his life. You see, when we talk about going back to the old paths, folks, that's old school. Old school is saying our problem is with God primarily. We have a sin condition that we need to repent of, and there is some stuff in our life that we need to cut off and have nothing anymore to do with it.

That, my friends, is old school, but here's the interesting thing about toward each other. Notice how that passage ends in chapter 4, gather yourselves together. Woo, we've become a gathering people lately, haven't we? Oh, I know we're supposed to stay six feet apart, wear a mask, sanitize your hands, do all that mess but, boy, we love to get in the streets, don't we? I mean, we love to march. We have become a people where, I mean, protesting has become the intramural sport of our country. Let me ask you: how many people are walking the streets crying for repentance? How people are walking the streets crying, "Return to God"?

You know what the cry is, whatever it is that they want. That's what the cry is and what does he say? He says when you do this, you gather in the streets. You know, if you were

to look back on the history of this land, the great revival movement started with a person here or a group there and pretty soon they gathered in the streets not to declare, "This is what we want or what we feel like we need," but to say, "All of us have a sin problem that needs to be repented of." Folks, we need to go old school and we need to begin to say the problem is our relationship with God, the problem is we have sin that is not repented of, the problem is there is some stuff that has no business being a part of our lives.

So what are the opportunities? Go back to chapter 6 and I want to close with this last statement. Those of you that are new to us, I love this word in the Bible, the word is "but." Anytime you find the word "but," you need to hold on and get ready. He talks about the old paths but then at the end of verse 16 of chapter 6, "But they said, We will not walk therein." You see, there's two opportunities that you have as an individual, you have as a family, we have as a church body, we have as a country, a community, even a culture, even humanity in totality. Two opportunities: we can either have rest in the Lord or we can experience resistance. What does he say right before that, "and you shall find rest therein." I don't know about you, but anybody here need a little rest? And I'm not talking about hours of sleep, I'm talking about emotional, I'm talking about mental, I'm talking about spiritual. Wouldn't it be good to wake up in the morning and not feel like you've got to fight everything around you?

Rest. You realize that's our opportunity. The funny thing is we spin our wheels much like the proverbial hamster in the cage, we keep just doing this and doing that and thinking somehow it's going to fix itself. What do we need to do? We need to do exactly what chapter 4 said, we need to stop the wheel, return, repent and remove. That's what we need to do and what does he say? You'll get rest.

Here's the problem. Look what Israel did. They said, "We will not walk therein." So what happened 2,000+ years ago? A group of people who knew the Bible verses, a group of people who had the history, a group of people who had all that heritage said, "You know what? We don't care what you say, Jeremiah. We don't care what God says. We are going to keep doing it our way." Here's the problem: around the corner they had no idea there was a guy by the name of Nebuchadnezzar, there was a country, a land by the name of Babylon. They came in, they pillaged, they tore up, they tore down, and they took their best young men and educated them in their way. The story is found in what we know as the book of Daniel, if you want biblical reference.

You see, therein lies the problem. You and I have this mental lack of reasoning that says, "It won't happen to us. Nope. We're invincible." You know we're in the South, right? When's the last time, "Hey guys, watch this," worked out? "Hey guys, watch this." Never works, does it? We say, "Oh, but that was then. This is now. We've evolved. We've cultured ourselves." You do realize the same things they were doing against the 10 Commandments are the same things we're doing against the 10 Commandments? Folks, we haven't improved a lick. You say, "Oh, but it won't happen to us." Allow me and I know we're short on time but allow me just to go there for a moment.

You know, the Bible says particularly at the end what we call the last time events, that there will arise a world system, there will arise an entity of sheer unadulterated evil. He will send a great delusion. He will cause people to buy into his system. Guess what the Bible calls that in Revelation 17? Mystery Babylon. Guess what? Most of us are walking right in the hands of history and haven't bothered learning from the last time this occurred.

Return. Repent. And remove. Folks, new school is not working for us. The health, the wealth, the prosperity, the popularity, it's not working. It is time that we as individuals, we as families, we as a church, we as a culture, we as a country said, "We have sinned against God and we need his forgiveness, we need his grace and we need his mercy." Because I've got news for you: it may not be particularly Nebuchadnezzar but Babylon is knocking on the door. The question is will we seek rest or will we resist because we know better? The choice is yours.