

## The Old Paths

"Thus saith Jehovah: stand in the ways and see, and ask for the ancient paths, which is the good way; and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein" (Jer. 6: 16, N. Trans.).

James McBroom

(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 32, 1940, page 106.)

The above passage should be read along with Matthew 2: 29 and Revelation 2: 4. To get its bearing on Israel it is needful to know not only the immediate context but to be acquainted with the moral condition as described both in these chapters and in the closing chapters of second Kings. It was a time of dark apostasy and morals were low. The degradation during the reign of Manasseh followed by the short time of Amon had brought the people of Judah and Jerusalem to a state of rebellion, corruption and God-defiance that eventually brought upon them that judgment from God known as the seventy years' captivity.

It was one of the most important moments in the history of the world for then the times of the Gentiles began. God makes the evil of the men to serve Him. This was the time when the sword of government was put into the hands of the Gentile in the person of Nebuchadnezzar, the time when the glory cloud, symbol of Jehovah's presence, departed from Israel to heaven. Ephraim, the ten tribes, had been taken captive by the Assyrian and Judah instead of taking heed fell into the same practices and got lower and lower till they became steeped in the abominable rites of the Gentiles around them and hope of general recovery there was none.

Josiah came to the throne a child of eight years and under the care of Hilkiyah and the godly remnant grew up in the fear of God. A revival began which led to the cleansing of the Temple. In the midst of this work the book of the law was found which gave great impetus to the work of recovery and outwardly the work of the Lord seemed to prosper. In spite of all this the general condition was so bad that judgment had to fall.

It was at this time that Jeremiah was called and through whom the voice of the Lord was heard and the veil lifted which gives a glimpse of the frightful condition of the people. Ecclesiastically, socially, morally the case was hopeless. Every kind of shameful moral impurity marked the people, priests, prophets and elders. Men were offering to false gods and their women baking cakes to the Queen of heaven. They are foolish (Jer. 5: 21), deceitful (Jer. 5: 27), sottish (Jer. 4: 22), hopeless (Jer. 3: 25), rebellious (Jer. 4: 17), treacherous (Jer. 3: 7), and impudent (Ezek. 2: 4). This was the state of things that Jeremiah and the remnant had to meet and these were some of the words he had to say to them. Remember too, that they had their religion. How like Christendom today. They boasted of the ark of the covenant. They had done so in Samuel's day and lost it to the Philistines, a circumstance of which they are reminded in Jer. 7; they were now to lose it for ever (see Jer. 3: 16). The temple too was their lying boast but they had made it a den of thieves. In spite of their wicked and licentious ways they boasted in the law, saying: "We are wise and the law of the Lord is with us" (Jer. 8: 8), and in spite of their descent to the awful corruption of the Phallic cults they still boasted in the Burnt Offering.

What a transcript of all this is seen in Christendom with her much greater light and responsibility to-day! Have we not defiance in the godless cults of the day in their blasphemous opposition to God, and the lying pen of the scribe (Jer. 8: 8, margin), in the modernist, the awful descent to mental

reservation in the pulpit; the godless trampling upon holy things by the people where the very name of Jeremiah is made a by-word for pessimism. It is needless to dwell on this, but see 2 Timothy 3. 1-5. It remained for the times of the Gentiles to produce in Christendom the darkest state of things that God ever permitted upon the earth. Infatuation always precedes judgment and it is at the door; yea, what if it is already active in the ravages of war begun?

It was during this time that Jeremiah in his second address to the people uses the text at the head of this paper. "Stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths." Has the gravity of the situation dawned upon us? Are we not in danger of taking this gracious appeal out of its place and apply it to what is merely external? Is there not distinct evidence on our part of seeking a correct ecclesiastical position without the inner moral condition which Jehovah pleads with His people about? But still more solemn, is there not a danger of missing the whole force of the Divine plaint and confining it to a mere detail, however solemn that detail may be? The old paths are clearly before us in Jer. 2: 2, 3. **"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness."**

What a tremendous moral difference in these words from the condition of the people detailed in these chapters. What of the truehearted remnant at this time? There were Jeremiah, Hilkiah, Huldah the prophetess, Shaphan the scribe, Ahikam and Baruch. These were not divided. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were all busy in the prophet's office at this time. It was no part of these to exhort each other to return to the old paths. What then? They were weeping (Jer. 13: 17), and saying, "Seek not great things for thyself" (Jer. 45: 5). But what of Jehovah God? His heart is laid bare in its pleadings here as nowhere else in Scripture. Like a husband deserted by a faithless wife He pleads for them to return, and as a father frantic with grief at the lawlessness of his children He calls upon them to obey.

What then is the bearing of Jer. 6: 16 by analogy on saints to-day? The passage is so constantly used for mere ecclesiastical purposes that we are in danger of not only losing its force but of perverting the solemn language of God to Christendom at this moment. Is it not clear that to us such a passage for external order is to lose the whole plaint of Jehovah, miss the pathos of the message and show ourselves incapable of that holy refinement that springs from the true knowledge of God? Let us then get beyond the ecclesiastical failure to the cause. The old paths and the good way mean much more than talking of divine principles or of assuming to be standing for the truth. **The men standing for the truth in the book of Jeremiah were living it.**

What then are the ancient paths? **Holiness to the Lord** (Jer. 2: 3). "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holiness unto Jehovah, the first-fruits of His increase." Have we not an echo of this for saints of today in the words of Revelation 2: 4, "I have against thee that thou hast left thy first love." Instead then of attempting to form a testimony for the Lord by artificial means let us like the brethren of the early part of last century listen to the voice of the Lord. "To him that overcomes, I will give to him to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev. 2: 7). Both this passage and Jer. 2: 2, 3 should be read along with Matt. 23: 30. "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me and ye shall find rest unto your souls." It is simple and easy to see that without all controversy the way to overcome is to imbibe the spirit of Christ.

God's principles never change and by putting these texts together we can see how the individual can overcome in an evil day and be in all the light of the dispensation and walking quietly in the fear of God with those likeminded (2 Tim. 2: 22), in the absence of all pretension to judicial administration may be well-pleasing to the Lord.