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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“GO TO SHILOH”**  
**Jeremiah 7:1-15**

Our text is Jeremiah 7:1-15. The prophet most likely preached this sermon in 609 B.C., yet to get to the heart of his message we must go back further in time.

🕒<sup>1</sup> We will start in 631 B.C. King Josiah is sixteen years old when {2 Ch 34:3} **“he [begins] to seek the God of his [ancestor] David.”** It is a miracle, given the fact that his father left him an example of extreme depravity.

🕒<sup>2</sup> Four years later in 627 B.C., Josiah initiates a public revival. {2 Ch 34:3-8} **He begins to purge the nation of pagan worship sites, carved idols and cast images.** As a private individual and a public leader Josiah does {2 Ch 34:2} **“what is right in the eyes of the LORD.”**

🕒<sup>3</sup> It is one year after this {Jer 1:1-2} in 626 B.C. that Sovereign God calls Jeremiah to prophetic ministry. He begins to plead with his people to return to YHWH.

🕒<sup>4</sup> Five years later in **621 B.C.** {2 Ch 34:8-13} King Josiah commands the renovation of the temple. {2 Chr 34:14-21} A priest finds a part of the Book of the Law that was lost (probably Deuteronomy). When it is read to Josiah he tears his robes, confesses that the nation has **“not kept the word of the LORD”**, and sends a team to **“inquire of the LORD...about what is written in this book.”**

{2 Ch 34:22-28} The men bypass Jeremiah and go to the prophetess Huldah (possibly because they expect her to give a gentler answer. If so, they are mistaken!) She

does assure them that in response to Josiah’s authentic humility and grief over Israel’s sins **the LORD will not allow him to witness the impending catastrophe.** She also warns that since the people have forsaken the Almighty, they will suffer all the curses recorded in Deuteronomy 28.

☆ A lesser monarch might relax in his own blessing, but King Josiah expands the revival:

★ 1<sup>st</sup>, {2 Ki 23:1-3; 2 Ch 34:29-32} he leads his subjects in the renewal of the covenant;

★ 2<sup>nd</sup>, {2 Ki 23:4-7; 2 Ch 34:33} he eliminates the remaining pagan priests and shrine prostitutes;

★ 3<sup>rd</sup>, {2 Ki 23:8-20} he centralizes worship at the temple by desecrating every place that has been a center for pagan worship;

★ 4<sup>th</sup>, {2 Ki 23:21-23; 2 Ch 35:1-19} he revitalizes the Passover Celebration; and,

★ 5<sup>th</sup>, {2 Ki 23:24} he cracks down on pagan folk religion by getting rid of mediums and fortune tellers.

The idols are gone. The pagan priests are dead or expelled. All of Judah has publicly pledged {2 Ch 34:31} **“to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees.”** The temple has never looked fresher, the feasts have never been more popular, and the people have never offered more sacrifices.

Not only so, {2<sup>nd</sup> Ch 34:33} for **“As long as [Josiah] [lives], [his people] [do] not fail to follow ... the God of their [ancestors]”** – at least insofar as external religious benchmarks are concerned. 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23:25 announces that **“Neither before nor after Josiah was**

**there a king like him who turned to the LORD as he did – with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength”!**

⌚<sup>5</sup> Fast forward 12 years. Until now Josiah has obeyed YHWH; but in 609 B.C. he goes to war in violation of God's will and is slain by the Egyptian pharaoh. This is when Jeremiah preaches today's text.

■ Jeremiah 7:1-2: **“This is the word that came to [him] from the LORD: ‘Stand at the gate of the LORD’s house and there proclaim this message.’”** His listeners are going to the temple to offer sacrifices and pray, or coming out after doing so. What they hear is not pleasant. Holy God levels two grave accusations at them.

☀️ Accusation 1: Judah is guilty of hypocrisy.

■ In verse 3 the LORD declares that they are doing everything right inside the temple, yet their **“ways and... actions”** outside it do not honor him and must be reformed.

■ In verses 5-6a he indicts them for nullifying the religious reforms by failing to extend justice and mercy to their neighbors, especially the poor and powerless. They must **“change [their] ways... and actions.”**

■ And in verses 9-10 he asks, **“‘Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury... and then come and stand before me ....?’”** God charges them with divorcing their worship from their ethics, their Sabbath habits from their daily speech and actions.

☀️ Accusation 2: Judah is guilty of idolatry.

■ Verse 6b: **“do not follow other gods to your own harm,”** and verse 9: **“‘Will you...burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known...’”**

What is he talking about? Didn't King Josiah dismantle the pagan apparatus?

Yes, but surely Josiah's efforts to eradicate traditional idolatry have not been 100% effective. A minority are still bowing to idols concealed in their homes or hidden in the wilderness.

☠️ Worse than that, many Israelites are in bondage to a new kind of idolatry. They have gotten rid of their images of wood and stone and metal, only to devote themselves to a subtler idol – namely, false ideology about the temple and public worship.

■ Verse 4 warns: **“Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!’”**

But God ordained the temple's construction and approved its renovation. In what way is it **“deceptive”** to say, **“This is the temple of the LORD”**?

■ Take a look at verses 9-10. This does not answer our question directly, but it points to the answer: **“Will you”** commit all these sins **“then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’ – safe to do all these detestable things?”**

Judah actually believes God will forgive their habitual greed, immorality, and injustice if they go to church and bring the right offering and sing the right songs and pray the right prayers.

Judah actually believes God will grant them peace and prosperity, even as they are cruel to their families and stingy to their workers and unkind to the

vulnerable, so long as they present the sacrifices and do the rituals.

Judah actually believes God will bless them with health, wealth and security, despite their neglect of personal morality and public ethics, provided that they put in the effort on the Sabbath.

Of course, Jeremiah's audience *should* worship in the temple and make the sacrifices and do the rituals – as deeds of obedient trust and love for the Living God that also equip them to do justice and love mercy in their human relationships.

☠ But they have reframed worship as a commercial transaction in which worshipers perform actions A, B, or C and YHWH provides the appropriate services. Weekday attitudes, speech, and behavior do not enter into this equation any more than they do the purchase of gas at a filling station. In short, they have turned God into a vending machine, and the temple and worship system into an idol.

☑ Writing in the January issue of *The Covenant Companion*, Jay Phelan observes that:

**For most of human history gods... were objects of fear and awe – not love. Ancients made offerings to gods for two reasons: to keep the gods' attention elsewhere or to seek some favor from them.... But the God of Israel does not want to be feared or manipulated, placated or patronized. [He] wants to be loved.... "most people are still into fearing God and controlling God instead of loving God." .... They want to**

**control God's anger and manipulate God's favor. But God... wants us to love him and love others because he knows that love and only love will transform both us and the world....**

Judah has twisted Josiah's reforms into a method to control God's anger and manipulate his favor.

■ The consequences of Judah's hypocrisy and idolatry will be severe. In v 12 YHWH says, **"Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel."** When Israel entered the land they set up the tabernacle in Shiloh, in the territory of Ephraim. For 369 years the whole Hebrew people went there to keep the feasts, offer sacrifices and worship. It was the undisputed religious capital, the most sacred place in all of Israel.

○ But in 1104 B.C. the Philistines leveled the city and it never again served as a worship center. Psalm 78:56-60 explains that it was because of their idolatry that **"God ...rejected Israel.... He abandoned the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent he had set up..."**

■ So the words of Jeremiah 7:13-15 are chilling:

**"I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer. Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I *will* now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your [ancestors]. I *will* thrust you from my presence,**

**just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim.”**

There is no hope for Judah as a nation. They have set a course for oblivion, and their {Jer 4:18} **“own conduct and actions have brought”** them past the point of no return.

⚙ We see several of Jeremiah’s major themes in this: human responsibility, the stupidity of idolatry, judgment as the outcome of disobedient history.

⚙ But that is not all: we also see the theme of the invincible love of God. Amazingly, despite the habitual hypocrisy and idolatry, merciful God still holds out hope for a remnant!

■ Verse 3: **“Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.”**

■ And verses 5-7: **“If you really change your ways and your actions... if you do not oppress.... and do not shed innocent blood... if you do not follow other gods... then I will let you live in this place...”**

○ Most will not reform their ways, but a few will. Most will never again live in the Land of Promise once the judgment has fallen on them, but a few will. **“I will choose you,”** declares the LORD in Jeremiah 3:14, **“one from a town and two from a clan – and bring you to Zion.”**

Jeremiah 7 was not written *to* us, but it was written *for* us. What is God saying to us in this text?

I believe it boils down to this....

It is wonderful when the king (or president) does **“what is right in the eyes of the LORD”** and turns **“to**

**the LORD as [Josiah] did – with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength.”** Yet it is not enough to forestall judgment.

It is wonderful when church buildings are bursting at the seams and John Q. Public and Jane Doe go public with their religious faith. Yet it is not enough to forestall judgment.

It is wonderful when overt paganism fades away and false religions are abandoned and the people flock to worship. Yet it is not enough to forestall judgment.

Outward revival is only enough when it is paired with the inward revival. What we are talking about is a genuine return to the Living God that is marked by repentance, a transformed life, and a reoriented heart and mind. We are talking about ongoing renewal in which hypocrisy cannot thrive and even the subtler forms of idolatry are banished.

That is what it means for us to return to the LORD. If you do not believe me, go to Shiloh and see what Sovereign God did to it.

Jeremiah 7:1-15 is the word of the Lord.