

Look Not to the Temple

Rick Railston

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Jeremiah was called around 627 B.C. God called him to be a prophet and God told him what to say, as we know. He spent forty years prophesying during the reign of Judah's last kings. After Judah fell in 586 B.C., he was among the Jewish refugees that went to Egypt. In Jeremiah 7, versus Jeremiah 10—those chapters are often referred to as the message in the temple gate—Jeremiah lists, in those chapters, the causes of God's judgment on Judah and why Judah went into captivity. With that in mind, let's go to chapter 7 and verse 1 of Jeremiah and notice what we read; it's very interesting.

Jeremiah 7:1 *The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,
2) Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word ... (KJV)*

So he had to do that, he went to the gate of the temple and in front of all the Jews, proclaimed this word.

2 continued) ... and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD.

3) Thus saith the LORD of hosts, [LORD obviously all capitalized, YHVH, we understand that; He is also] the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings [God says to Judah], and I will cause you to dwell in this place.

If you amend your ways, if you change, you can dwell here in the area of the temple.

4) Trust ye not in lying words, saying, [now He's going to say the lying words] The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these [meaning, lying words]. (KJV)

So you have to ask yourself, why would God say that? Why would God say, *the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD* are lying words? What's His point—what's He trying to get across to us. Today we're going to investigate that and investigate why God calls these lying words and why God told the Jews to not look to the temple to save themselves. And we're going to see that today, He warns us not to look to anything physical to save us. The title of the sermon is Look Not to the Temple. As we're going to see, there are other things we should not be looking to. The first point that we want to make, looking at it historically, is:

1. Judah thought the existence of the temple would save them.

The temple was in their midst, they lived in the greater area around the temple, all through Judah, and they thought the very fact that the temple existed would save them. They made the mistake of thinking, because we have the temple, God will not allow us

to be taken captive, like the Northern Ten Tribes, because the temple is here, God is among us and with us, and He wouldn't allow that to happen. They believed because God's house was in Jerusalem, they would always somehow be protected no matter their conduct. That's the key. It's like modern Christianity, once saved, always saved. Once you give your heart to the Lord, it doesn't make any difference what you do, God will save us. The Jews were looking to the temple just like that.

There was another prophet who said the same thing. His name was Micah and he was a contemporary of Isaiah and he prophesied against Judah. Let's go to Micah 1:1, just to get the introduction to the book of Micah. As we see throughout all of the prophets, God's word comes to them. Did they hear a voice, did God's word come to them in a dream, was it in a vision?—we're not specifically told in all cases.

Micah 1:1 *The word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw [this vision or word] concerning Samaria [that's the Northern Ten Tribes] and Jerusalem. (KJV)*

It tells us that Micah was an inhabitant of Moresheth-Gath, a town about thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem. He prophesied approximately seventy years before Jeremiah did, so he prophesied around 752–697 B.C. Let's go to chapter 3 and verse 11 (I'll be reading out of the New International Version). Notice his condemnation of Judah.

Micah 3:11 *Her leaders [meaning the leaders of Judah] judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money [this tells you the mentality]. Yet they look for the LORD's support and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No disaster will come upon us." (NIV)*

Why? Because we've got the temple and God is not going to destroy His own temple; He's not going to destroy His own dwelling place, so we can pretty much do what we want; and as we see, they were taking bribes, they were telling fortunes for money. The problem is, despite God's warning, Judah did not, would not, change her conduct—that's the problem—despite the warnings from God. Let's go to chapter 6 and look at verse 10. Micah asks this question, God asks this question:

Micah 6:10 *Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, [talking about Judah and treasures from their evil] and the scant measure that is abominable? (KJV)*

The reference to *the scant measure* means a short measure, meaning if you were selling—to put it in modern terms—sixteen ounces of grain in a measuring cup, what they would do is have a measuring cup and they would say it held sixteen ounces of grain, but it would hold only fourteen or fifteen ounces, and they would fill it to the top, gladly. The customer would pay for sixteen ounces of grain but they would get only fourteen and the merchant would pocket the difference—a short measure—and it's abominable in God's eyes.

11) *Shall I count them pure with the wicked balances, and with the bag of deceitful weights?* (KJV)

They didn't have electronic scales like we do today, of course; they had a balance beam with pans on either side, and if somebody wanted a pound of cheese, sixteen ounces of cheese, they would put a weight on one side and measure out the cheese so that it balanced. The problem is, the weights on the one side weren't sixteen ounces, they were less than that, so the customer paid for more cheese than they actually got.

12) *For the rich men thereof are full of violence [the Hebrew can mean and is probably better translated *injustice* or *unrighteousness*—no just weights, no just balances, and unrighteous, ungodly behavior], and the inhabitants thereof have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth.* (KJV)

They were described this way, of course, because they were cheating everybody in their path. The point is, this wouldn't have been written if the majority of the people had been righteous. I think we can safely conclude that the majority of the people were wicked in their behavior, kind of like we see today in our country. Verse 13; let me read this out of the New King James.

13) *“Therefore [because of your wicked behavior] I will also make you sick by striking you, By making you desolate because of your sins.*

14) *You shall eat, but not be satisfied; Hunger shall be in your midst. You may carry some away [some of the food away], but shall not save them; And what you do rescue [the food] I will give over to the sword.*

15) *“You shall sow, but not reap; You shall tread the olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; And make sweet wine, but not drink wine.* (NKJV)

Why?—because of their conduct. God foretold what He wanted. He said, rather than all of this, here is what I want you to do. Look at verse 6.

6) *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old?*

7) *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, [God is saying] the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

God is asking, is that what I want from you?

8) *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, [this is it] but to do justly, [have fair balances, don't cheat] and to love mercy, [have mercy on people and give to those in need] and to walk humbly with thy God?* (KJV)

The problem is, Judah would not—despite all the warnings. Despite sinning greatly, Judah thought, we've got the temple, God is here; He's not going to destroy us in the

temple because we're His favorite people; the temple is right here, and we can pretty much do what we want because God is right here. God would never leave us, He would never leave the temple; He's always going to rescue us at the end of the day.

Hosea prophesied that God would ultimately depart the Holy Place, so Judah was told (we're going to read these scriptures), you keep doing what you're doing and God is going to leave. He is not going to tolerate this—He is going to leave. Hosea prophesied somewhere between 770–725 B.C., before the Northern Ten Tribes went into captivity and before Judah went into captivity.

Let's go to Hosea 5:3, where Hosea quotes God. I'm sure God either caused the prophets to write it down or He just gave them a memory of every word.

Hosea 5:3 [God says] *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hid from me* [their acts are not in secret, I can see that]: *for now, O Ephraim, thou committest whoredom, and Israel is defiled.*

4) *They will not frame* [most modern translations say *direct*] *their doings to turn unto their God* [they just won't do it]: *for the spirit of whoredoms is in the midst of them,* [how would you like that said of you or me?] *and they have not known the LORD.* (KJV)

That is a sin—not to know God.

5) *And the pride of Israel doth testify to his face: therefore* [because of all of this] *shall Israel and Ephraim fall in their iniquity;* [now he brings it to Judah] *Judah also shall fall with them.*

We know Judah would fall more a hundred years after the Northern Tribes fell.

6) *They* [referring to Judah] *shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD;*

This means that in those days, when you made the trip, for the Feast of Tabernacles, for example, you would take your tithes with you—they were on hooves and you would take them with you to offer a sacrifice to God and to offer your tithes to God.

6 continued) *... but they shall not find him;* [notice this] *he hath withdrawn himself from them.* (KJV)

You see, this is a hint that God is going to withdraw from the temple. We're going to see He withdraws from the temple for very good reasons, because of their deeds and their sins, despite warning after warning after warning. Look at chapter 9 and verse 12.

Hosea 9:12 [Hosea says, through God's inspiration] *Though they bring up their children* [God is saying], *yet will I bereave them, that there shall not be a man left: yea, woe also to them when I depart from them!* (KJV)

That was another hint from Hosea that there would come a time when God would depart from the temple. A time would come when God would literally remove His presence from His own house.

Ezekiel prophesied the destruction of the temple in chapters 4 through 8, so you can be turning there in Ezekiel. Remember Ezekiel was taken captive to Babylon in 597 B.C., and what we're going to read was written over ten years before Jerusalem was destroyed. He prophesied that God was going to leave the temple and would not save them. He told them He was going to depart from the Most Holy Place. Let's go to Ezekiel 8, and chapter 8 lists the abominations before God. These were done (you can imagine the sins that were being done around the land) but these were done right on the temple grounds. I won't read the whole chapter, but they erected an image of Tammuz in the form of a cross, just outside the temple. In the beginning of verse 6:

Ezekiel 8:6 *He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do [what Judah is doing, around My house]? even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from my sanctuary?* (KJV)

He said, it's so bad that I'm going to leave because I'm not going to stand this, and I'm not going to be in the presence of these abominations, indicating that God would leave the Most Holy place at some point in the future. They'd been given warnings.

6 continued) *... but turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.* (KJV)

Going on, the idols are pictured on the walls of the priests' chambers, women are worshipping Tammuz as part of a fertility cult, and the priests stand with their backs toward the temple worshipping the sun in the East. Then in verse 17:

17) *Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here?* (KJV)

Can you imagine doing all of that on the temple grounds? They have drifted so far from God.

17 continued) *... for they have filled the land with violence ...*

That's the same Hebrew word we read in Micah 6:12; injustice, unrighteousness, all matter of evil.

17 continued) *... and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose.* (KJV)

That was a term they used back then; we would say, they thumbed their nose at God, much like a person talking with his hands would do this [the speaker makes a dismissive hand gesture] towards God. That's what they did to God: The temple is here, we can do what we want—take that!

18) *Therefore will I also deal in fury:*

Think about this, for your children and grandchildren, and your parents and grandparents.

18 continued) ... *mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.* (KJV)

What they're crying is, God, how can you leave us? Your house is right here, we're right here, you are our God (they would say); they don't follow God but they would make the claim, and God is saying, you had *years* to return to Me. You've been warned and warned and warned, and you kill the prophets and run them out of town and you do what you want to do. The core of the problem is, Judah worshipped anything but God—all manner of animals, all manner of pagan religions—anything but the true God. Guess who was right there provoking them—our adversary, Satan the devil. God is patient; He is kind; He is longsuffering; He is gentle; He wanted to be near His people. I ask, what God would come down, and make His presence known in a building, so He could be near His people—what does that say about God? Look at what Israel did to the God who loves them and cares about them. They just told Him, essentially, to take a hike, because we want to do what we want to do. Why would God want to stay in this house when Israel says, we don't want you, we don't need you. We want other gods. We'll worship who we want to, thank you very much. That's what they said.

Ezekiel also prophesied God's departure from the temple, in chapters 9 through 10. Let's turn to Ezekiel 10 to read a couple of scriptures. Ezekiel prophesied God is going to do this if you don't change your ways, but they didn't listen, and God eventually left.

Ezekiel 10:18 [This actually happened] *Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house [God's house], and stood over the cherubims. 19) And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth [remember the cherubim carried God's throne; He has a portable throne, in addition to His throne in heaven] in my sight: [Ezekiel said] when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and everyone stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD's house [that was the entryway to the temple]; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.* (KJV)

Meaning, God was going up and He was going away, and they were all looking up and staring at it. This is a prophecy of what God would do and God indeed did. God left the Most Holy Place before what happens next—before what happened in reality, and this is well documented in history. Let's now go to 2 Chronicles 36:11. There was an evil king

in Judah and finally God had enough. There are limits—God has limits. He is very patient but He has limits.

2 Chronicles 36:11 *Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.*

12) *And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking from the mouth of the LORD.*

13) *And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, [notice this] and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel. (KJV)*

He willingly rejected God. He turned his face from God. What a lesson is this: never, ever reject God and turn away from God.

14) *Moreover [if that wasn't enough, the king himself, and] all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; (KJV)*

Can you imagine?—God's nation, God's house, and the people do this.

14 continued) *... and polluted the house of the LORD ...*

This sanctuary, this wonderful place where God's presence existed, they polluted it,

14 continued) *... which he had hallowed in Jerusalem [as Ezekiel prophesied]. (KJV)*

They willingly rejected God, and guess what happened—verse 15.

15) *And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers [meaning the prophets], rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, [notice this] and on his dwelling place ... (KJV)*

Remember in the building of the tabernacle and then the temple, God gave explicit instructions how those two structures were to be built. When you read the accounts, God gave His Spirit to the workers, and gave them extra skill and extra thinking ability, and extra craftsmanship to build the tabernacle and then His temple. God loved His dwelling place; it was built to His specifications, inspired by His Spirit. Judah thought, because of that, He'll never leave. God has compassion on His people and on His dwelling place, but notice verse 16.

16) *But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, [here's the key] until there was no remedy. (KJV)*

Until God said, they're not going to change—enough is enough. So God throws a switch.

17) *Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees [Nebuchadnezzar], who slew their young men with the sword [notice this] in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: [God said enough is enough] he [referring to God] gave them all into his [meaning Nebuchadnezzar's] hand.*

18) *And all the vessels of the house of God [that were so carefully and lovingly crafted], great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all these he [Nebuchadnezzar] brought to Babylon.*

They were not in the land anymore.

19) *And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof. (KJV)*

That occurred in 585 B.C., and you know what God was saying?—you thought the temple would save you; you made the temple an idol, as if to say, as long as this idol is here, as long as this building is here, we're safe and we can do everything we want to do. God was saying to them, look at your idol now. It's just charred wood, broken down stones, and all the good things are gone—look at your idol now. After Judah's captivity to Babylon and later the dispersion, the diaspora, as it's called, the temple was rebuilt later. The fact is, Judah didn't change. The Jews—once the temple was rebuilt and they were dispersed—would travel hundreds if not thousands of miles to visit the rebuilt temple. They began again to idolize the building. The point is they never changed. God was showing Israel and the Jews over and over that a building couldn't save them, something physical couldn't save them. When will you learn?—and they did not learn.

Let's go to the second point. We're going to bring it to the modern day. Does history repeat itself?

2. In the modern-day, greater Church of God, some people think that a corporation—or a man—will save them.

Just as Israel looked to the temple to save them, people look to buildings, to corporations, to administrations, structures, and even to human beings. As with Judah and the temple, many thought (back when I came into the Church) that the Worldwide Church of God would save them, or Herbert W. Armstrong would save them. Back in the days of Worldwide, I heard the following preached—this is not speculation, this is not something I heard from somebody else, I heard it with my own ears—and I'll just give you some quotes: God will never allow Herbert W. Armstrong to die before Christ comes. This was believed because it was thought he would lead us to the place of safety; he was going to lead us into the Kingdom of God. I also heard, this is God's

Church—He will never allow the Worldwide Church of God to fall. Just as the Jews said, God will never allow the temple to fall; it will never happen. If you had the opportunity to visit the Ambassador College campuses—there were three of them: one in England, one in Big Sandy and one in Pasadena—they were beautiful, just like the temple was beautiful. They were gorgeous—the grounds, the auditorium, this magnificent building, and all of that. Then there was the organization all around it, the infrastructure all around it. People began to do, what?—they began to idolize all of it. Either a man, or the infrastructure, or the property, or the buildings, or the administration—just like the Jews did.

In fact, a man told me, who knew Mr. Armstrong well—he would visit with Mr. Armstrong, he lived on the campus—and he told me, “If Mr. Armstrong told me to kill someone, I would do it.” That is a direct quote, I heard it with my own ears, and I was shocked. In his eyes, Mr. Armstrong was God on earth. So if anybody could countermand the commandments, Mr. Armstrong could, and this man’s thinking was, I’ll do whatever he says. Think to yourself, if Mr. Armstrong says this, and God’s word says this, and you’re going to do what Mr. Armstrong says, now all of a sudden Mr. Armstrong, a man, is above God’s word. People used to do that.

After all of that, look what God caused or allowed to happen. As with the temple, it was all torn down. God allowed that whole infrastructure, the beautiful campuses—all of that is now gone. God removed our idols. Today, people make the same error, even after all of Ambassador College and the Worldwide Church of God are gone. People make the same error by putting a corporation or a group in front of God. I’ve heard this, these are direct quotes (long after the death of Mr. Armstrong, within the last fifteen years or so), “If you are with us, you will be saved because we are the only ones going to the place of safety”—Okay, now we’re speaking for God? Our leader speaks in place of God? I heard a minister say, directly to my face, “We are the only group God is dealing with.” This was a tiny group. Then a leader said, “You can’t speak to your relatives, you can’t speak to your friends in other groups, because they are not part of us.” I know brethren who won’t speak to their family members because they are not part of a particular group. We had a brother and a sister, and the brother wouldn’t take the sister to a different group—wouldn’t do it—she didn’t have transportation and he wouldn’t do it because that other group was not part of his group. It’s gone so far that one leader has changed the baptismal ceremony to include himself in the baptismal ceremony as a prophet—you have to acknowledge him before you are baptized, if you can imagine.

Recently, one of the leaders has said, “Yes, the Bible has said that, but you can’t teach that because it violates church tradition.” What are we putting first here? What are you putting in front of God when you make statements like that? It reminds me of what Solomon said: The thing that has been is the thing that will be. That which is done is the thing that will be done; there is nothing new under the sun. The same thing that Judah did and Israel did is happening today. Check it out in Ecclesiastes 1:9. The concept that a human or an organization can save us is not found in the Bible—you just can’t find it, it is not there. God does not want us to put anything between Him and ourselves. Rather, we find God saying just the opposite of the quotes I’ve given you.

Let's go to Galatians 6:7, and this comes from the mouth of Paul. Paul knew about the Jews; he was trained at the feet of Gamaliel; he was the Pharisee of the Pharisees; he had a lot of credibility with the Jews, and in his letter to the Galatians—let's pick it up in chapter 6 and verse 7—Paul is telling the people and us today,

Galatians 6:7 *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: [you can't thumb your nose at God, you can't do that; you can't put the branch to your nose at God] for whatsoever a man [an individual, a human being] soweth, that shall he also reap. 8) For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (KJV)*

So what's the message? We are judged according to what we individually do, not what our leader does. I had a minister tell me directly—I was there in the audience—you do what I tell you and if I'm wrong God holds me responsible and not you responsible. That is not what the Bible says. It's just not. If we put anything before God, it is idolatry. Whether we're looking to the temple, looking to an administration, looking to an institution, looking to a man for our salvation, it is idolatry. For a reference scripture, check 1 Corinthians 10:14; it just says flee from idolatry. We can't allow idolatry to creep into our midst.

The third point now—this is a lesson we need to learn that Israel and Judah did not:

3. God has destroyed and God will destroy every idol a human being will make.

God has, in the past, and will, in the future, destroy every idol men make. We won't turn there but in Genesis 11 is the account of the Tower of Babel. It was built to get people to heaven and to get people on the level with God—the same level. It was just like when Satan said, in Isaiah 14, I will ascend to heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. To attempt such a tower, they were taking themselves up into God's domain and thinking, we can be right there with God, we can be like God, we can actually supplant God, and guess who was behind all of that. It was Satan, obviously. So, what did God do? He changed the languages, confused the languages and soon the Tower of Babel was abandoned; it became a relic and it just deteriorated. History tells us that the Tower of Babel became an idol and God rendered it useless. It's interesting, and there is some speculation that the current fashion of building obelisks harkens back to the Tower of Babel. That wouldn't surprise me in the slightest.

During the time of Israel coming out of Egypt, what did God do in the ten plagues? Every one of those ten plagues was aimed at an Egyptian idol and God destroyed every one of them, right in front of their eyes. Then Israel came out of Egypt and they were in the wilderness, and it didn't take them long to do what?—build a golden calf and worship this golden calf. Do you remember what Moses did to the golden calf when he came from the mountain and he was so angry? He ground it into powder and he scattered the powder over the water and then he made the people drink the water—heavy metal. That undoubtedly helped shorten their life span, but he made them drink the gold in the water. A day or two later, their bowels moved and the gold was in their

excrement, and God said, look at your idol now, Israel. Where is your idol now? It's in this small mound right down here. Speaking of thumbing one's nose, God was thumbing His nose at Israel—so much for your idol. He was telling them that. Then what happened with the Philistines? Let's go to 1 Samuel 5:1. God repeatedly destroyed every idol that Israel put in front of Him. The ark of God, the ark of the Covenant, had been captured and the Philistines had it.

1 Samuel 5:1 *And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod.*

2) *When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. (KJV)*

The ark is a very small structure and they set it at the feet of Dagon, thinking Dagon is more powerful than the God of Israel.

3) *And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD [as if Dagon was down worshipping the ark]. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.*

4) *And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; [but notice] and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. (KJV)*

God was saying to the Philistines, look at your idol now—what about this idol you worship; how much power does it really have? Then of course we know that in 70 A.D., God destroyed the temple again because the Jews would not learn, and they idolized the building, and thought they could do anything they wanted because the temple was there.

Let's go to Luke 21:5; notice what Christ said. This is Christ prophesying an event that would happen a few years after His death. Remember God is destroying every idol, and you can see here in the wording that the people idolized the building. I'm sure even some of the disciples early on idolized the building.

Luke 21:5 *And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts [how beautiful it was and it was so wonderful], he said,*

6) *As for these things which ye behold [meaning the temple itself and all the adornment], the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. (KJV)*

After that came to pass, in essence, God is saying to the Jews, look at your idol now; will you ever learn? They learned that the temple's presence in Jerusalem would not save them; it didn't save them from Nebuchadnezzar, it didn't save them from the Romans. Their idolatry is what caused their destruction and the temple did not save them. God allowed the Worldwide Church of God to be destroyed. He saw that the campuses, the buildings, were sold off, and a lot of those buildings have been bulldozed

to put in apartments. God was saying, look at your idol now—it's under the treads of a bulldozer. We've seen down through history that God has totally destroyed all of the idols His people have attempted to worship, and He will do so until Christ returns. Every idol we put in front of God, He will ultimately destroy right in front of our face. That leads us to the fourth point.

4. At this point in time, God is in the process—amongst all of us, His people—of destroying the biggest idol of all.

God is doing that as we speak, as we sit here this day. Let's go to 2 Timothy 3:1 and see what that idol is. The biggest idol of all, down through history, down since Adam and Eve were created—this is the biggest idol of all. Paul says to this young man, this minister:

2 Timothy 3:1 *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2) For men shall be lovers of their own selves ... (KJV)*

Meaning they will put themselves before God. They will do that in the last days. They've been doing it since Adam and Eve but it's going to get worse. What is the biggest idol of all? It's the self, it's us. It's the biggest idol of all. Look at Luke 14:26; this should have been a scripture read to us prior to baptism because it deals with the self, and what are we going to do with the self?

Luke 14:26 [Christ says] *If any man come to me [wants to obey me, wants to follow me, wants to be a disciple], and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, [this is the key] and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. (KJV)*

The word hate here is Strong's #3404 and Zodhiates says, in his Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament, it means *to love less*. If we put ourselves before God, if we love ourselves more than God, that is idolatry. Now let's jump to Colossians 3:5. Paul here outlines conduct—the same kind of conduct Israel was exhibiting, the same kind of conduct the Jews were exhibiting—that was happening in his day and is happening now. I'll read this out of the New King James.

Colossians 3:5 *Therefore put to death [kill] your members which are on the earth: [meaning they are physical] fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. (NKJV)*

Covetousness particularly is idolatry because you're taking to the self. You want this, you covet this, more than following God, take it to the self. All of these, fornication, uncleanness, so on and so on, are all putting the self before God. God's commandments say don't do that, and if we do that we're saying, God, I'd rather do this than follow you, so I'm putting this above you, and I'm putting this instead of you. When we sin, that's what we're saying—I'm talking about sinning willfully, as in, I would rather

sin than do your will. If we say that or even think that, and that's the choice we make, and we go ahead and do it, shame on us.

Now let's go back to an example of that in 1 Samuel 15. We're breaking into the account of Samuel and Saul. Samuel is speaking to Saul (1 Samuel 15:23) because Saul did this—he put himself before God; he put his will before God. Understand that rebellion is something active; to exhibit rebellion you have to actively do it.

1 Samuel 15:23 *For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness [stubbornness is more passive; you can be stubborn without saying a word; you can be stubborn without waving a sword] is as iniquity and idolatry. [Both of them are if we put something before God—notice what is being told to Saul:] Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (KJV)*

Saul made a choice, my way or God's way; he picked his way. He's being called on the carpet; Samuel is saying, because you picked your way, you can't be king, because God is not going to have a king who exalts himself above God. Stubbornness is Strong's #6484, and it means *arrogance*; that's one of the definitions. Meaning, I know best, my way is best. People say today, I'm comfortable, I don't want to change. What does Laodicea say?—I've got need of nothing; I don't want anybody making waves. I want my NFL and I want my boat; I want my perks and I want my summer camps and to go out at Feast time, and all of that stuff—I don't want anybody destroying my comfort zone. I don't want to do that; I don't care what God says, this is what I want. So I'm going to plug my ears and not listen to what God says.

If we idolize the self—and I'm speaking from experience—God will knock us down; He will knock us down so far and so completely that we finally have to face who comes first—me or God? If we keep putting ourselves in front of God, He will just knock us down again and again, until we get hit and the light bulb comes on, and we say, what have I been doing? I've been putting myself before God. We have to decide who comes first, ourselves or God. I'm ashamed to say it's only taken me forty-five years in the Church to learn this—only forty-five years. I've been in the Church well over fifty years and I've only learned it in the last seven, eight, six, five years. Stubborn—really thick between the ears. I finally realized that my way doesn't work. Every time I try to do something my way, it blows up in my face, I hurt other people, I cause my own self pain and suffering and grief, I cause the people I love pain and suffering and grief, when I put myself first, before God.

Finally, we learn that only God's way works. Our way doesn't work—will never work—only God's way works. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 6:16. A warning about idols. This is the passage that defines us as the temple of God.

2 Corinthians 6:16 *And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? (KJV)*

God left the temple because idols were present and Israel wouldn't change. What about the idol of the self? We're putting it in spiritual terms now. What agreement has the temple of God when we idolize ourselves? How can we be the temple of God and make ourselves an idol?

16 continued) ... *for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* (KJV)

How on earth—with God dwelling in us, walking with us, being in us—can we say, no, God, I'm going to put myself first? How can we do that and still be the temple of God? We can't. God is patient, kind, longsuffering, and forbearing, and He will allow it up to a point just like He allowed it up to a point with the temple, until finally enough is enough. We have to realize, closing out this fourth point, that whatever we put before God, He will remove, including us. If at the end of the day, we put ourselves before God, we are going to be removed. We will be eternally dead because God will not tolerate someone in His Kingdom who puts themselves first; that's obvious. Okay, the fifth and last point.

5. We have to focus on God, and we have to focus on Jesus Christ, and we have to repent of putting anything before Them.

Christ clearly said the Father is superior to Me, and He recognized that God is superior; He is the Most High, He is the Almighty, and we can't put anything before Him. Now let's go back to Jeremiah 7:4; we read this in the introduction. We're going to pull this together now. We read verse 4 in the introduction; we'll read it again. Jeremiah was talking to Judah and telling them, hey, you can't trust this building.

Jeremiah 7:4 *Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD ...* (KJV)

It's interesting that The King James Study Bible (Thomas Nelson, publisher) says this of Jeremiah 7:4, and they got it right: *Jeremiah's God-given message was straightforward: the physical presence of the temple was no guarantee that judgment would not come upon Jerusalem. God's wrath against Judah's sins could be averted only through a genuine repentance that would be reflected in their total lives—and they would not.* God is saying, instead of trusting in the temple, here's what you have to do (let's continue reading the passage in context):

5) *For if [a big if] ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour;*

6) *If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place [meaning, the temple—that's the subject], neither walk after other gods [in this place] to your hurt ...* (KJV)

Everything we've read in verses 5 and 6 is repeated in the New Testament that ought not to be done. Putting all of this in front of God shouldn't be done. In verse 7, if they amend their ways, then God says:

7) *Then will I cause you to dwell in this place [temple at the center of it], in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.*

8) *Behold, ye trust in lying words [the temple, the temple, the temple—those are the lying words], that cannot profit. (KJV)*

God asks the question:

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;*

Are you going to keep doing that?

10) *And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered ...*

The New International says, *we are safe*, because we're in the house, we're near the house, we have the house,

10 continued) *... 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 [God says; it's not a secret], saith the LORD. (KJV)*

As we know, He ultimately left because they did not amend their ways. Judah thought they were safe because of a physical building; they didn't amend their ways and they were taken captive.

Let's take it to the present day and let's look at what is prophesied for us. We've already read 2 Timothy, verse 3, *men shall be lovers of their own selves*; that's going to happen in the last days—we see it all around us. We see it in the Oval Office, we see it in the Church of God. Philippians 2:20, let's go there. Paul is writing from Rome during his imprisonment and notice what happened as Paul was nearing the end of his life. Notice what he says; it's sad.

Philippians 2:20 *For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.*

21) *For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. (KJV)*

That happened to a lot of people in the early New Testament Church after the newness wore off and persecution started—guess what they did? They just went back and sought their old ways because they didn't want the hard road. We are told by much tribulation we enter the Kingdom of God, and they said, I didn't plan for this; I want to go

back to my football and I want to go back to my golf; I want to go back to my cars and I want to go back to my hobbies. Let's go to 2 Peter 2:9. Notice what we're told:

2 Peter 2:9 *The LORD knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations [or tests, or trials], and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished: (KJV)*

God knows how to do that and He's going to do that. The question is, are we going to be the godly or are we going to be the unjust?

10) *But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they ...*

Meaning they despise government in the sense that God rules over all of us, and that comes into direct conflict with *I don't need anything and I'm going to do what I want*. Notice this word:

10 continued) ... *selfwilled [the self], they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*
11) *Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the LORD.*
12) *But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;*

We don't want to be among that group.

13) *And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings [and this tells us who they are] while they feast with you; (KJV)*

These people are part of the greater Church of God, not exercising God's Holy Spirit, maybe never even being converted—only God knows that—but they feast with us. The lesson here in 2 Peter 2:9 and on, is that being self-willed leads to destruction. If we want our own way, if we insist on doing it our way, destruction is at the end of that road. It also applies to the ministry. You can go to Ezekiel, there are plenty of condemnations there, but let's go to Isaiah 56:1; it's a prophecy for us today and it's very specific to the ministry. Isaiah is saying, this is what God says, and we had better pay attention.

Isaiah 56:1 *Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice:*

How many times have we read about being just and fair and judging correctly?

1 continued) ... *for my salvation is near to come, [remember, this is a prophecy for us] and my righteousness to be revealed. (KJV)*

God is revealing, as we get closer to the end, more and more of His righteousness and Christ's righteousness than ever before. Verse 10.

10) *His watchmen* [God's watchmen; we're going to see in a second they are referring to the ministry] *are blind* [we're told]: *they are all ignorant* [we're told], *they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark ...* (KJV)

Meaning *to warn*—you put a dog out in the yard or a dog in the house, and they hear a noise and start barking. God is saying, these ministers are dumb dogs; they can't even bark to initiate a warning. He goes on to say, they can't bark because they are ...

10 continued) *sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.*

11) *Yea, they are greedy dogs* [not just dogs but they're greedy dogs] *which can never have enough,* (KJV)

Meaning they are in the ministry for the wrong reasons. They are there to serve the self and not to be served. We have seen plenty of that over the last fifty years, where the ministry was elevated up to the "West Point" of the work—this elite cadre of people, and if you weren't part of that group, you couldn't have a sane thought in your head. They were there to be served rather than to serve. For those of you that have come into the Church recently, I'm so thankful that you didn't have to experience that.

11 continued) *... and they are shepherds* [this identifies who they are] *that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.* (KJV)

Meaning, who's being put first—the self. Hey, ministry can do it too, and we've seen it. What they're doing is serving the self and not the flock. Quite a condemnation, and we as ministers can never, ever, allow that to happen. Serving the self rather than the flock, how can that be done? How can that even be thought of or imagined?—we can't do that. God is telling us that we have to repent for making the self an idol. That is the prime idol that we all face. Sometimes God (and he's done it with me) will allow us to assert ourself and our will before His will, and then He quietly stands back and watches it explode in our face and make a mess of everything, to teach us a lesson that our way doesn't work. I have learned that over and over, and I think, finally, in the last five or ten years, I have learned I don't even want to think about my way, because I know it's going to blow up in my face if I do. We must come to the place where Christ was, the last night He was on earth. Remember, He was kneeling down sweating great drops of blood, and He asked, God, could you remove this from Me? At the end He said—you remember—not My will but Yours be done. Luke 22:42—that should be with the ministry and with the brethren that care about God, and want to put God first and want to worship the true God—that has to be our mantra: Not my will but Yours, be done.

We will be like Israel and Judah if we don't amend our ways, and we will be taken captive to prove that idolatry leads to captivity. We're not going to be taken captive by the Assyrians or the Babylonians or the Romans, but if we commit idolatry now, we're

going to be taken captive by Satan. You think falling into Nebuchadnezzar's hands would be bad, it holds not a candle to falling into the hands of Satan. We have to be very, very careful that we do not put ourselves first, before others. *Esteeming others better than ourselves*—in our marriages, within the Church, and in our friendships, always letting the other go first.

Let's conclude. The physical presence of the temple did not save Judah; I think that's apparently obvious. They thought the presence of this building—all the glamour, the shining facade, the courts and all that was inside this temple—meant that God wouldn't walk away; He just wouldn't do that—God's judgment would not come on Judah, and they made a horrible mistake. The same is true for the physical presence of a corporate structure, the physical presence of a corporate administration in the Church, and the physical presence of an individual leader; these will not guarantee us salvation. In fact, these will take us in the opposite direction because they can become idols, and we have seen in the Bible (and we just scratched the surface) no idol can save us. No idol can save us, and if we put ourselves before God, where are we then?

One last scripture; let's just summarize with this last one because the Apostle John used it to summarize his first letter—his first epistle in 1 John 5, and let's go to the very last verse. Notice how he closes the epistle. It's important that when you end a letter, you put the last thing you want remembered at the very end, and that's exactly what John did.

1 John 5:21 *Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. (KJV)*

That sums it up. The Greek word for *idols* is Strong's #1497, *eidólon*, and it has two meanings, one that applies and one that doesn't. The first meaning is the one we all normally think of as an image or a likeness—it could be stone or it could be wood, or whatever, a picture—and people bow down in front of it. Well, nobody in God's Church is going to do that, I don't think. The second meaning is what applies to us—it means a false god. What he is saying is, keep yourselves from false gods, and that can be an institution, it can be a human being, and more often than not, it can be ourselves. A false god—I am in need of nothing, I don't need you, I'm going to do it my way, and that's just the way it is.

When we hear what we heard in the beginning—the temple, the temple, the temple, what the Jews said—understand that it is Satan's effort to get us to turn to idols, to get us to turn to false gods. Let's remember this verse we just read, John summing it up: *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*