

Ask for the Old Paths

Rick Railston

August 13, 2016

It was a very dangerous time and in many ways it was similar to our time today, but the date was 586 BC, plus or minus a couple of years. Someday we'll know the exact date. The Babylonians are on their way to take Jerusalem. Let's turn to Jeremiah 6. If you have a marker, you will probably want to place it there, because we will be coming back to this section of scripture throughout the sermon. The Babylonians are heading to Jerusalem and we know by way of history what actually happened. Jerusalem was taken. The temple was destroyed.

Jeremiah 6:1. *O ye children of Benjamin, ... (KJV)*

Benjamin is mentioned here, because Jerusalem is located in the land given to Benjamin.

1b) ... gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa ... (KJV)

Tekoa was a small town about twelve miles south of Jerusalem.

1 continued) ... and set up a sign of fire ... (KJV)

The reason for the fire, of course, is a fire of warning.

1 continued) ... in Beth-haccerem: ... (KJV)

That is a small village between Jerusalem and Tekoa. It was on a hill, though.

1 continued) ...for evil appeareth out of the north [Babylon was coming from there], and great destruction. (KJV)

We know that there was indeed a great destruction. God was allowing the Babylonians to take Jerusalem. He could have stopped it, but He chose not to.

10) To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised [not converted], and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; ... (KJV)

Imagine this. These are the people of Jerusalem and Judah. The Hebrew word for "reproach" means God's word was a *disgrace* to them or a *shame* to them.

10b) ... they have no delight in it. (KJV)

Their mind was in other places.

11) Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days.

12) And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together: ... (KJV)

Nobody was going to be spared; young, old, married, single. It didn't make any difference.

12b) ... for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the Lord.

13) For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.

14) They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. (KJV)

Again, all that we have just read is similar to today. Don't worry it's peaceful, but there's no peace anywhere. We are seeing that more and more.

15) Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the Lord. (KJV)

The same occurs today. There is no shame at the pervasive wickedness that exists all around us, in the United States, Canada, England, the western countries.

17) Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

18) Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. (KJV)

This means what is Judah's condition.

19) Hear, O earth [the whole earth]: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. (KJV)

Does all of this sound like the world we live in today, rejecting God, rejecting God's law, especially the United States and Canada and Australia and the United Kingdom? All of the western nations are following Judah's example. You would think we would learn, but the western nations have not. We know what Babylon did to ancient Judah and Jerusalem. God is going to cause a similar horror to come upon all the world, because the world does not listen.

What is the solution to Judah's evil, contemptible behavior? What is the solution to all of the evil that we see around us today? This same area of scripture gives us the answer. Let's read 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 [Judah and Jerusalem] said, We will not walk therein. (KJV)

Today we are going to see that there are powerful lessons we can learn from Jerusalem's and Judah's example that we just read. We are going to see what these old paths are that we are admonished to go back and ask for them. We are going to conclude with a key. We are going to find out that we must ask for the old paths and we must walk in them, if we have any hope of escape. So, the title of the sermon is

Ask for the Old Paths

1. Why did God cause this horror to come upon Jerusalem first and then later Judah and why will God allow this same kind of horror to come upon those of us at the end of this age?

This is the first point we would like to make. Why did God cause this horror to come upon Jerusalem first and then later Judah and why will God allow this same kind of horror to come upon those of us at the end of this age? Jeremiah tells us. We just read it. We are going to cover several reasons why God allowed this to happen to ancient Judah and Jerusalem. Also, we are going to see that we are in the same boat and He is allowing it to happen to us for the very same reasons.

1.A. God's word was shameful to them.

It was a disgrace to them, as we read in verse 10. Let's look at the United States today in regard to God's word being a disgrace, being shameful. We see all over the country the removal of the Ten Commandments from state houses or from schools, from plaques on the wall. They are taken down. We see the prevention of prayer in schools. I think it was maybe a year ago, about this time of year, maybe going on into the fall, there was a coach who led a prayer before a high school football game and they fired the guy, because he dared kneel his team down and say a prayer for everyone's safety. Somehow that just got the hackles up on the school board and some other people.

In 2010 in this country a federal judge ruled that the National Day of Prayer was unconstitutional, if you can imagine that. Now it is winding its way through the courts up to the Supreme Court to see if the National Day of Prayer somehow aligns with our constitution or not.

Then the statement "One Nation under God" is now being attacked. In 2002 the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco, the most liberal circuit court in the United

States, ruled that it was unconstitutional for students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, because it had the phrase “under God” in it. That is winding its way through the courts, headed to the Supreme Court someday.

Then we see various groups deconstructing the Bible. *Deconstruction* is a term that’s used meaning “to tear apart” the Bible. They are claiming that the Bible is not the word of God. They are claiming the Bible is a bunch of myths fabricated by ancient peoples, written by human beings and there is no God.

Then there is an increasingly prevailing view in the United States particularly, Canada also, that those people who are religious are unbalanced. In fact, I read an article the other day where a psychiatrist said that if you believe and adhere to a religion, by definition you are mentally unbalanced. That is the prevailing view in many areas. The list goes on and on that God’s word is shameful. God’s word is a disgrace.

1.B. Covetousness

Another reason tying today with what happened to ancient Judah and Jerusalem is that the nation is totally covetous. We read that in verse 13. Again, let’s look at the United States today. It is amazing that people elected to the Senate or the House of Representatives in Washington D.C. go there and they don’t have a whole lot of money. A few years later in retiring from Congress they are multimillionaires. How does that happen? At the same time they have retirement for life and they have paid medical for life. How does that happen? Why would you want to be a congressman? Well, there is a reason.

It is just amazing what is going on in the Supreme Court. There is a case called the *Kelo v. City of New London* case. The Constitution tells us that private property cannot be taken for public use without just compensation. Public use has been previously defined by law and through the courts as something that’s used by the public, like a road or a public building. You can condemn property and put a freeway through. A few years ago the justices voted five to four to completely bulldoze a neighborhood in Connecticut for public use. Do you know what the public use was? It was a corporation that would pay more taxes than the residences paid at that time. So, the corporation sued and got all of the land condemned. They bulldozed it and the neighborhood got up in arms about it, filed a lawsuit and they lost. Guess what? One of the justices who voted in favor of it personally benefitted from that vote. Covetousness and greed drive our leaders and frankly a good number of the people in the United States today.

1.C. Dealing falsely and dishonestly.

A third reason why God allowed that nation of Judah to fall and will allow the western nations to fall is that the nation dealt falsely or dishonestly. We read that in verse 13. I remember Mr. Armstrong often quote Elbert Hubbard. He was a contemporary of Mr. Armstrong and was a philosopher in that time. He said that when a majority of the

business dealings within a nation are dishonest, that nation will fall. That is exactly what's happening in the United States today.

Let's look at this. We renege on our treaties. It started with the treaties we had with the American Indians and it goes on and on and on. We routinely renege on our treaties. We do what's best for us regardless of the treaty that we sign. We spend billions on pork barrel projects by congressmen and senators. These pork barrel projects spend multiple tens or hundreds of millions of dollars on projects that benefit a very few while our infrastructure, our roads, our bridges crumble. Yet, we're spending all of this money to line the pockets of a very few.

We have a nation of cheats and liars. People routinely cheat on their taxes. Health care fraud is an enormous business, running into the billions. Identity thefts run into the billions. That is quite common today. Politicians become beholden to special interest groups who get them elected. The special interest groups contribute to their campaigns and then they demand favors later. Presidential contenders, as we know, boldly lie with no conscience. They can show it on TV that they said this yesterday and they're saying this today. They're saying no I didn't lie, but it's right there in front of the whole world. It doesn't seem to bother them. Too many businesses, too many individuals deal falsely. Abraham Lincoln famously walked several miles to return a few pennies when he was overpaid. Today that just doesn't happen. The list goes on and on.

1.D. They flaunted their sins.

The nation, we are told in Jeremiah, was not at all ashamed by their actions. We find that in verse 15. Again, let's look at the United States today. Everywhere there is a flaunting of sin. Dorothy came in last week and said, look at this advertisement. She gets a couple of women's magazines. It was a full page ad with a picture of woman who looked like a goth. She had short hair. She had dark, dark lipstick, dark, dark shadows around her eyes. She had shadows in the hollows of her cheeks. She had this evil look on her face. The headline of this lipstick ad said *urban decay* and had the picture. Down below the caption says *too much vice is not enough*. That goes on and on and on. People see it and think it looks cool and then they copy it. You walk looking at people and think, what on earth just walked by me here? Everywhere you see that sin is not just tolerated. It is promoted, whether it's premarital sex, whether it's adultery after marriage, whether it's homosexuality, whether it's materialism, whether it's greed. All of the nations today are following along these same paths. The sad thing is that the United States is leading that parade. It's easy to see why God brought this horror on Jerusalem and why He is going to bring it upon us.

1.E. The nations would not listen.

The last one, but it's not the least is that Jerusalem and Judah, as well as us today, would not listen. You find that in verse 10, repeated again in verse 17, repeated again in verse 19, three times. Today the nations and the leaders of the nations don't want to hear anything about God, don't want to hear anything about God's word. So, again it's

easy to see why God caused Judah to fall and why He will do so again in the not-too-distant future.

2. What are the old paths?

We have seen why Judah fell. We have applied it to today and the United States and the modern nations today. The second point we want to investigate is what are the “old paths” Jeremiah was referring to? He said “ask for the old paths” and things will go well with you. He said the old paths are “the good way”, so what is he talking about? God through Moses gave Israel the path to walk, the right path, the good way. Let’s go to Exodus 18:20. Ancient Israel was given the right way. They were given the direction, but over time they refused to walk on that path. God is talking to Moses.

Exodus 18:20. *And thou shalt teach them [the Israelites] ordinances and laws, and shalt shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do. (KJV)*

You will show them the right path. You will show them the way to walk, what they must do. God gave them His laws, His statutes and judgments that defined all of that.

Now let’s go back to the time of Solomon. Let’s go to 1 Kings 8. Solomon here is dedicating the temple and he said essentially the same thing, encouraging Israel to stay on the good path.

1 Kings 8:22. *And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: (KJV)*

He was dedicating the temple through this prayer to God. Let’s go to verse 36 to get the crux of the matter.

36) *Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, ... (KJV)*

We know the story of Israel and Judah. Sometimes there was a renewal and they would walk that way for a period of time, but more often than not they got off of the path. They got off of the good way and they went into evil, sin, disobedience, Satan worship and all kinds of abominations. Guess what the result was? Let’s go back to Jeremiah and look at chapter 3:8. God saw all of this. He would bring evil upon them. They would repent, have a reformation for a period of time and go back to evil. It just went over and over and over, cycle after cycle. Finally God said enough is enough. Israel fell to the Assyrians in the 720s BC and then about 585-586 Babylon was allowed to come after Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 3:8. *And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, ... (KJV)*

They did not learn lessons from it.

8b) ... but went and played the harlot also. (KJV)

God had to take them away. So, you see Jeremiah was pleading with Judah to return to the old paths. His words today resonate with us, because we must return to the old paths, which are the good way.

3. What are the old paths for us today?

We know what the old paths were for Ancient Israel, but what are the old paths for us today? Do these scriptures apply to the New Testament Church of God? Let's go back to Jeremiah 6:18.

Jeremiah 6:18. *Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation, what is among them. (KJV)*

This means what is your state, what is going on among them?

19) Hear, O earth [the whole world]: behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words, nor to my law, but rejected it. (KJV)

We saw here in verse 1 that God is talking through Jeremiah to Judah and Jerusalem. We also know there are many scriptures that say that ancient Israel was a congregation in the wilderness. We won't take the time to prove that, but you can look it up for yourself. The word "congregation" in the Hebrew is Strong's number 5712. It can mean *a family, an assembly, a company, a multitude or a people*, a pretty broad definition. So, God is not only talking to a congregation, but He is talking to the nations and He is talking to the whole earth, because there are lessons that all of the earth needs to learn. There are lessons that all of the nations need to learn and to know and to understand. As we have just been talking about, they are not doing that at all.

Let's ask a question under this third point. Could this also apply to the New Testament Church of God, to us? It's easy to point fingers at the world and say, yes it applies to this group and that group or some other group. Does it apply to us? As we learned decades ago about prophecy, there is usually an early fulfillment and there is a later fulfillment. We all know that the church is a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, but notice also a holy nation and a peculiar people. In 1 Peter 2:9 Peter says that.

1 Peter 2:9. *But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (KJV)*

Since we are a holy nation and a peculiar people, both of those fit the definition of congregation that we just read. I personally think (my opinion) that Jeremiah 6 also applies to the church in these end days. It definitely applied to Judah and Jerusalem. Regardless, we know that the Old Testament was written for our learning and our admonition so every lesson in the Old Testament applies to everybody down through the ages. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 10:11. Paul is talking about Ancient Israel. We have been talking about Ancient Israel. We have been talking about Judah and Jerusalem. We have been talking about Babylon on their way to destroy them. Paul is talking about these same subjects.

1 Corinthians 10:11. *Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (KJV)*

The "ends of the world" coming is a lot more pertinent to us than it was to the people in Paul's day.

12) Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. (KJV)

In other words we ignore the lessons of the Old Testament to our own peril. We understand that man does not know the path to walk upon. Human kind does not know. In Jeremiah 10:23 it says:

Jeremiah 10:23. *O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps. (KJV)*

It basically says man doesn't know of himself how to put one foot in front of another. He just doesn't know the way. David also understood this concept. In Psalm 143:8 he is talking to God and says:

Psalms 143:8. *Cause me to hear thy lovingkindness in the morning; for in thee do I trust: cause me to know the way wherein I should walk; for I lift up my soul unto thee. (KJV)*

David didn't trust himself. He said you have to show me the path. You have to define the way, the good way, the old path. For us, what are the old paths? The old paths are the foundation of our Christian life, aren't they? Paul had a lot to say about that. Let's go to 1 Corinthians 3:10 out of the New King James version. The old paths are the foundation of our belief. The old paths are the way that we should walk based on a foundation.

1 Corinthians 3:10. *According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.*

11) *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (NKJV)*

You see, our foundation, our old path is based on Jesus Christ and the life He lived on this earth. Let's go to Ephesians 2:20. Paul adds some more to this concept.

Ephesians 2:20. *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets [New Testament and Old Testament], Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; (KJV)*

It is all tied together. The prophets came first. The apostles came later. Christ ties them all together. Now let's go to 1 Timothy 6:19. This is looking forward about our foundation, about the path we walk.

1 Timothy 6:19. *Laying up in store for themselves [God's people] a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (KJV)*

Looking forward we are going to need a good foundation in the time ahead so that we can hold on to eternal life. That good foundation is the path that we walk on. You see, for the New Testament church, the old paths for us are what the apostles wrote and what the apostles did and what Christ wrote and what Christ did. It's all tied into the Old Testament. It's all together. You see, Jeremiah's words not only apply to Judah and Jerusalem, but they also indeed apply to the church today. There was a problem in the early New Testament church. Paul is writing these words and he is saying the foundation is built on Jesus Christ. We have to follow the path that Christ walked when he was on this earth. The apostles followed suit. The early New Testament church was under attack by Satan.

4. The old paths, the foundation of the New Testament church, were quickly being undermined by Satan.

Those old ways, those old paths were being systematically undermined. Let's go to Jude and read verse 3. Jude was written as best we can determine approximately 66 AD Notice what was happening already at that time. Just thirty plus years after Christ died Satan was already at work.

Jude 3. *Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (KJV)*

We can see here that there is a problem. Why would he say that if there was no problem, if they were already on that path? If they were already following the faith that was once delivered, he wouldn't need to make that statement. He says, but you need

to earnestly contend for what was originally delivered to you through the apostles and through Jesus Christ. We have to ask the question: What on earth was going on in the New Testament church that would cause him to make that statement, to cause the brethren to leave the path that was once delivered? At the time that this was written, you see, in 66 AD the truth was already being perverted. Look at verse 4.

4) For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. (KJV)

Satan quickly attempted to pervert the New Testament church. Edward Gibbon in The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, written in 1821, said this, "A dark cloud hangs over the first age of the church". Then the book The Story of the Christian Church, written in 1970 on page 33 says, "For fifty years after Saint Paul's life a curtain hangs over the church through which we strive vainly to look and when at last it rises about 120 AD with the writings of the earliest church fathers we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of Saint Peter and Saint Paul". I can remember Mr. Armstrong saying essentially the same things. He said a curtain comes down and then a hundred and twenty to a hundred and fifty years later it rises and somehow everything is different. What they were doing a hundred and fifty years later was not what the apostles said.

Let's just take a few minutes here and do a thumbnail sketch of what happened to that early New Testament church to see the perversion that came in and it only took about two hundred years for the church to be completely perverted. The Catholic Church as we know it, the pope as we know it hadn't formed yet. The bishop of Rome was the most powerful bishop in the Christian at that time. His name was Anicetus. He was the first bishop of Rome that acted like a monarch, a king. In 154 AD, fifty plus years after the death of John, he changed the date of Passover to the Sunday following Nissan 14. That was just in Rome, in Italy, but he stepped forward and did that.

Less than two hundred years later in 321 AD on March 7th Emperor Constantine legalized Sunday as a weekly day of rest in the Roman Empire. He didn't do it for religious reasons. He did it for control reasons. He said, "On the venerable day of the sun let the magistrates and the people residing in cities rest and let all the workshops be closed". That has nothing to do with Christianity. The venerable day of the sun was the pagan worship of the sun god.

He was very much anti-Jewish. As an expression of his anti-Jewishness within the Roman Empire at that same time guess what they did? They made the people fast on the Sabbath and then Sunday was the day of celebration. So, what they were doing was denigrating the Sabbath and making the Sabbath something people didn't want to do. They didn't want to have anything to do with fasting and all of that. That would mean they would look forward even more so to Sunday, the day of the worship of the sun.

From a book Too Long in the Sun by Richard Rives he says, "The importance of the actions of Constantine cannot be overstated. During his reign pagan sun worship was blended with the worship of the Creator and officially entitled Christianity." You can see how quickly things began to develop. In the book Faith of our Fathers, written in 1876 by James Cardinal Gibbons, the Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore, he agreed that the shift to Sunday is not based in the Bible and was solely the work of the Catholic Church. He took credit for it. He said the Catholic Church has the authority to do it. "You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we [Catholics] never sanctified."

If that wasn't enough, in 325 AD the Council of Nicea ended what was called the Quartodeciman Controversy. Quartodeciman means fourteen. The controversy was between do we keep the Passover on the fourteenth or do we do it on Sunday? Rome had already decided to do that, but there was a raging hundred and fifty year battle about that. It was finally settled in 325 AD with the Council of Nicea. The Council decreed that Christians should celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Sunday. After the council was closed, Emperor Constantine went on a rant against Jews and against quartodecimans saying they were anathema in the Roman Empire if they believed this. He ordered severe persecution against anybody who kept the Sabbath, against anybody who kept the Passover on the fourteenth. In 363 AD at the Council of Laodicea the church at Rome, which we know today as the Roman Catholic church said, "Christians must not Judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honoring the lord's day on Sunday and if they can, resting therein as Christians. But if any shall be found to be Judaizers, let them be anathema from Jesus Christ." If you keep Saturday, you are anathema within the Roman Empire.

Finally, in 381 AD the Counsel of Constantinople, modern day Istanbul, Turkey, forty-four years after Constantine's death, the emperor was then Theodosius the Great convened a council and he officially made the Catholic Sunday the official religion of the Roman Empire. This is what Theodosius said, "We authorize the followers of this law to assume the title Catholic Christians, but as for the others, since in our judgment they are foolish madmen, we declare that they shall be branded with the ignominious name of heretics." They had to keep Sunday.

Also, guess what that council did that year. They established the doctrine of the trinity. It is interesting that The Harper Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism on page 586 it says this, "The trinity, which up to that point had nowhere been clearly stated, not even in scripture". Of course, we know that. Back in the Worldwide Church of God days we had people trying to explain the trinity to us and nobody made any sense. Nobody could explain it. They can't explain it today.

My point is here about the church going off of the path, the church being attacked by Satan was that by the end of the three hundreds, just two hundred years after the last apostle died, Sunday observance prevailed over Saturday, Easter prevailed over the Passover, the trinity prevailed over the duality of God.

5. The old paths are restored.

A little over sixteen hundred years later God restored these old paths through Mr. Armstrong and the Worldwide Church of God. He restored many of those foundational truths that were lost. You see, our old path, our good way was the foundation that we learned when we first came into the church. It was very clear. We made huge changes in our lives from holidays to holy days, from Sunday to Sabbath and all of the other changes. Those truths were restored through Mr. Armstrong.

Now, was everything that Mr. Armstrong taught perfect? No, it wasn't. He was a human and he made mistakes, so his words cannot be placed at the level of scripture as some people do. At the same time we cannot ignore the fact that God called him and through him revealed truths that we keep today and that we would stake our lives on. He laid a foundation of lost truth based on what Christ said, based on what the apostles said and did. We have been well served over the years because of that revelation.

All of the elders of the Pacific Church of God agree that before we change any brick in that foundation, before we change any doctrine in that foundation we must have overwhelming proof from God that He wants us to do so. We see among the scattered groups doctrines being changed all of the time and we have to be very, very, very careful that we stay on the old path, which is the good way.

The same holds true for tradition in the church. Since the '40s and '50s, those of us who have come into the church, Dorothy and I came in in the early '60s, there are many traditions in the church, too. For example, what we are doing today is a tradition. We have an opening prayer, then we sing songs, then we have a sermonette, then we have another song and announcements, then we have a sermon, then we have more songs and then we close with a prayer. You can't find that in the Bible. It's not there, but it is a tradition that goes back to the 1940s and the 1950s that we hold. It is not found in the Bible, but it has served us very, very well. Yet, over the years I have had people come to me and want to change all of that; just want to throw it over, throw it away, scramble it up, completely undo it. With that in mind let's go to 2 Thessalonians 3:6. This is talking about tradition, because tradition is important. It gives us stability. It gives us continuity. In a way tradition is part of our foundation. Paul is strongly commanding the brethren, not just suggesting.

2 Thessalonians 3:6. *Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. (KJV)*

Undoubtedly, Paul established traditions. Peter did, too. The other apostles did. Paul is saying, if you don't follow the traditions we have established and you are walking disorderly and want to cause chaos and trouble and revolution and all of that, then you

don't have a leg to stand on. He is saying, I'm commanding you brethren to withdraw yourself from such people. Obviously, tradition is important.

Summing up this point that sixteen hundred years after Satan attacked the church certain foundational truths were restored through Mr. Armstrong. The point is today we seek to follow the old paths. We seek to follow the foundations laid by Jesus Christ, built upon by the apostles. We want to follow those paths. Much of that was restored by Mr. Armstrong and it has served us well in the following years, both tradition and truth. We can be thankful that God did restore these truths and we are recipients of those truths.

6. The attack on the old paths continues today.

Something that we have to be very much aware of is that the attack on the early New Testament church that we just talked about, two hundred years that it took them to change virtually everything, continues to this day on the current New Testament church. Satan infiltrated the early New Testament church and began getting it off track, getting it off of the path and, as most of us know, if we have a background through the Worldwide Church of God, he did the same thing again. It continues to this day.

Why did Satan do that? Why does he continue attacking, attacking, attacking? What is his goal? What does he want to accomplish? Why won't he let it go, so to speak? Let's go to John 10:7 to see why. It is part of Satan's nature. If we think that Satan is going to leave us alone because we have come into the church or we're some spiritual giant and we are converted up to high level and we think we are impervious to Satan's attack, we have to think again. Christ was talking to the people. They didn't get it in the verses prior to that.

John 10:7. *Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.*

8) All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9) I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (KJV)

When sheep go to pasture, that means they have food and water and protection. They are taken care of. Now we come to Satan.

10) The thief cometh not, but for to steal and to kill, ... (KJV)

The first thing is to steal away from Christ, steal out of the church. Once they are stolen they can be physically killed.

10b) ... and to destroy: ... (KJV)

The most important is to be spiritually destroyed, going to the lake of fire, no remembrance from that point on of them. Christ is contrasting Himself next.

10 continued) ... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (KJV)

He is the good shepherd, not a bad shepherd, not a shepherd that wants to kill or ignore or persecute the brethren.

11) I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. (KJV)

He did indeed do that. Shepherds today should be willing to sacrifice their lives for the sheep. We are told we should be living sacrifices, all of us for each other.

12) But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, ... (KJV)

He doesn't take ownership of the sheep, meaning he doesn't feel responsible for the sheep. Christ is the owner of the sheep, not any minister.

12b) ... seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: ... (KJV)

This is because he is selfish. He is interested in his own welfare and his own benefit. We have all seen that.

12 continued) ... and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. (KJV)

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that this is happening today big time. I think somebody said now there are almost five hundred groups, something like that scattered all over.

13) The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. (KJV)

That is something we have to be very careful about. The ministers have to be very careful that we always put the sheep first, not in front of God, obviously, but in front of ourselves.

*14) I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.
15) As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. (KJV)*

We all should be willing to lay down our lives for each other, as the scripture tells us.

16) And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: ... (KJV)

That is referring from the time Christ gave up his life down to this very day. We are of a different fold, but we are his sheep.

16b) ... them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. (KJV)

This is the church of God, Christ at the head, no corporations. God doesn't recognize human corporations. People need to understand that and learn that. There is one shepherd, one body of Christ.

This is very clear. Satan wants to steal us away from God, ultimately wants to kill us physically, kill us spiritually. He continues to do so more aggressively as we get closer to the end. Therefore, we have to be very, very careful, because he is not giving up. In fact, he is accelerating his provocations against God's people.

7. Ask for the old paths.

What is the big lesson for the Church of God today here in Jeremiah 6? What can we take from Jeremiah 6 and the warnings that he gave and the encouragement that he gave that applies to us today that will help us not following Judah's footsteps and Jerusalem's footsteps? Jeremiah 6:18 from the New Living Translation.

***Jeremiah 6:18.** Therefore, listen to this, all you nations. Take note of my people's condition. (NLT)*

That's what we are doing today. We are taking note of the condition of Judah and Jerusalem that caused all of these things to happen, Babylon to come and just decimate the people, tear the temple down and haul the people away.

19) Listen, all the earth! I will bring disaster upon my people. It is the fruit of their own sin, because they refuse to listen to me. They have rejected all my instructions. (NLT)

That's a condemnation if there was ever a condemnation. They refuse to listen. They have rejected all of my instructions. He says, nations, the earth take note of this, because if you don't learn from it, it's going to come upon you. We need to take note of Israel's and Judah's conditions and not repeat their sins.

The big lesson for us today is in 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 [lives]. But they said, We will not walk therein. (KJV)

They said no, but we have to say yes. We have to walk the old paths, which are the good way, and we have to heed and we have to listen. You see, those old paths are the foundation that God has given us in His word. We have to take heed and we have to listen to God's word. Judah and Jerusalem said we don't want to hear you. We are tired of it. We're done. We're finished. Look what happened to them. You see, therefore all of us and especially the ministry must take this warning to heart and be on guard against any effort by Satan to get us off of the path, to get us off of the good way. We have to be very, very careful about that. Satan is far smarter than any of us. The only hope we have is through God's holy spirit.

Let's end this final point with a final lesson. Turn to Zephaniah. We don't often go there. Zephaniah was the last of the minor prophets. He warned Judah before the Babylonians arrived, so it ties in to Jeremiah 6. Notice his admonition in Zephaniah 2:1.

Zephaniah 2:1. Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, ... (KJV)

If you are applying this to the modern day Church of God, we would say fellowship is more important as we get closer to the end. Iron sharpens iron. We can help each other, uplift each other, uphold each other and encourage each other. Fellowship is increasingly important.

1b) ... O nation not desired; (KJV)

We already pointed out in 1 Peter 2:9 that the church is a holy nation. We know we are not desired by the world. In fact we are told to come out of the world in so many places.

2) Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you, before the day of the Lord's anger come upon you. (KJV)

Yes, the day of the Lord's anger for Judah and Jerusalem was when the Babylonians arrived. For us it is the day of the Lord. You see, there is an early fulfillment and there's a later fulfillment. The early fulfillment was what Judah faced. The later fulfillment is what we will undoubtedly face. Here is the solution. God always gives us a solution. He will present a problem or a challenge, but He always gives us the solution.

3) Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought [practices] his judgment; ... (KJV)

Here is the key.

3b) ... seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. (KJV)

If that doesn't apply to us in the end days, I don't know what does. You see, righteousness and humility are the keys. Righteousness means keeping God's

commandments, keeping God's way of life, being unspotted from the world, having a pure heart and a pure mind and pure motives. On top of that humility, not to exalt the self, not to seek our own way, but to serve others and esteem others better than our self and to be a living sacrifice for others. Righteousness and humility are the keys to drawing close to God and they help us obey His way of life, because we're not exalting the self. We are not saying, God I know better than you. Humility would never say that. The bottom line is if we practice righteousness and humility, seek them and practice them, we are going to be protected from the trouble that comes.

Looking back on Jeremiah 6, looking back on ancient Judah first, that fell in the 700s BC and then Jerusalem that fell in 585 to 587 BC in that area, Jeremiah told them and tells us today to walk in the old paths, which are the good way. They did not listen and look what happened to Judah, just decimated as a nation. The temple mount was just destroyed. What happened though is Christ, when he came to this earth, and the apostles did walk in the old paths, did walk in the good way. They are the same paths we make an attempt to walk today. We have to walk in those paths and not go off on some cockamamie new idea. We have been given a wonderful foundation. We have been given the truth and we must hold to the truth.

Somebody sent me a paper the other day that was just off the wall. I said, look I have enough problems obeying what I know to be true. The last thing I need is to get out here in left field on some issue that has no bearing on salvation whatsoever, don't have time to even think about it. We have to pay attention to the truths, the foundations, the old paths and the good way. You see, the old paths for us is our foundation, which is our doctrine, what we believe, what we see in the Bible and the traditions that God has led us to keep.

We have trouble all around us. This world is going nuts, absolutely crazy, locally, nationally, worldwide. The old paths, our foundation, God's word, God's law, scriptures give us stability and comfort in trying times. They are things we can grab onto as sure and firm when everything about us is in chaos and it's only going to get worse. Our neighbor had a fire and we thought our house was going up. It was a matter of seconds. Thankfully, God intervened or we could have lost our home. It points out that our life can change in a matter of seconds. It can be a car wreck. It can be a disaster of some kind. It doesn't make any difference. The fact is that apart from God we are very vulnerable people. Satan has this world in turmoil. For all I know Satan may have already been cast down. We don't know, but if you look at what's going on in the world today, there is evil on top of evil on top of evil. The fact is that the old paths, the foundation that's been established, our doctrine, our traditions give us stability in this increasingly unstable world.

Let's go to Psalms 61:3. David says something that's very important in regard to what we're talking about. This is something we have to focus on and hang onto in times of sickness, in times of test and trial.

Psalms 61:3. *For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. (KJV)*

David had all kinds of trouble. If you look up the Hebrew word “shelter,” guess what one of the meanings is? It is *a place of refuge* or *a place of safety*. So, David knew that God and God’s word are a shelter when times get really, really bad. These old paths, these good ways are what we should hold onto in troubling times, just as God told Jerusalem to do and Judah to do twenty-six hundred years ago, but they wouldn’t listen. If we do hold onto the old paths and we do walk in the good way, we’re going to be shielded from what lies ahead.

Let’s go back to Jeremiah 6:16 one more time. Let’s not forget this admonition, because it does apply to us today.

Jeremiah 6:16. *Thus saith the Lord, ... (KJV)*

God is saying this. It’s like He is right here in the room saying it.

16b) ... 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 [lives]. (KJV)

So, let’s seek the old paths. Let’s seek the good way and let’s find peace and tranquility and rest in these very troubled times.