

international turmoil, Jeremiah laments the spiritual complacency of his Judean compatriots with these words: “Neither said they, Where is the Lord...?” and “The priests said not, Where is the Lord?” (Jer. 2:6,8). Despite the troubling nature of its spiritual and political affairs, the prayerful voice of anxious spiritual inquiry was not to be heard. Thus the prophetic complaint on the part of God and His sensitive messenger.

The prayerful plea of “Where is the Lord?” is likewise seldom heard in our land today. The widespread religious confusion, doctrinal deviation, and rampant immorality seem to meet with little dissent from church quarters. Though one might be tempted, in the face of the prevailing wickedness, to wonder if God had mysteriously withdrawn His presence from the contemporary scene, few are the voices raised to God in earnest prayer that God would show Himself strong in the behalf of His people, by lifting up a standard of moral strength and holiness to stay the present flood of evil (Isa. 59:19).

Like the late 7th-century Judah, the church of our day stands at a crossroad that calls for a fresh enquiring after God, that He might once again establish a standard of Biblical truth (Jn. 17:17), doctrinal integrity (Eph. 4:14,15; Titus 1:9), and practical holiness (Titus 1:16; 2:3). This generation, which stands in the aftermath of the Pentecostal, Healing, and Charismatic revivals, has yet to evidence that deep-seated search for God (Jer. 29:13), that moves beyond surface-level religious enthusiasm (Jer. 3:10) and anxiously inquires for the old paths (Jer. 6:16). Unless we permit the Spirit of Grace to have His perfect work in us, the refreshing of past revival will become but a reception of the grace of God to no practical effect (II

Cor. 6:1), and a sad instance of the bringing forth of thorns and briars after drinking in the rain from Heaven (Heb. 6:7,8).

Yes, we do well to stand still for a season, halt all headlong “progress” and “ponder the path of our feet” (Prov. 4:26), enquiring with longing desire for a vital relationship with Jesus Christ and asking, as the priests and people failed to do, “Where is the Lord?”

This important question, once asked, is answered in various ways by different people. Some, with a somewhat pantheistic view of God and a tendency to adore the creation rather than the Creator, would say that God is to be found in the wild and can best be communed with in close connection with nature. They often feel no need of the collective worship of a church setting. Others are proud of their church membership and sport a bold profession—they believe that the essence of true communion with God consists in church attendance or ritualistic observances. In fact, many of this mind-set, if asked if they are Christians, will quickly respond with a reference to their church affiliation. “I am Baptist,” they may say, or “I am Methodist.” God, however, is not to be found in the plethora of denominational labels, perfunctory church attendance, or devotion to ritual. Jeremiah’s temple-gate sermon (Jer. 7:1-11) dispels the myth that mere profession, formal attendance, or attention to ritual, can compensate for genuine repentance and a real, heartfelt union and communion with the God of Heaven.

## ***No Refuge In The Temple***

*“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD’S house, and proclaim there*

*this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all [ye of] Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, [are] these. For if ye throughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye throughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; [If] ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever. Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, even I have seen [it], saith the LORD” (Jer. 7:1-11).*

The multitudes who trod God’s courts in the early reign of Jehoiakim took delight in approaching unto God (Isa. 58:2), and were no doubt shocked when Jeremiah by Divine inspiration informed them that God was sorely displeased with their substitution of ritual for genuine repentance and a life of righteousness. They thought that their faithful temple-attendance, veneration of its impressive structures, and preoccupation with its prescribed ritual rendered them safe from the threat of Divine judgment and the possibility of foreign invasion. But such was simply not the case. God saw completely through their superficial show of religion, and, in essence, told them that they would

find no refuge from the consequences of their sins in mere profession and religious observances, however legitimate these expressions were in themselves. They were informed of the fact that they were laboring under the false assumption that God is inalterably committed to a place of worship or a group of worshippers *regardless of the moral condition of the worshippers, or the character of their worship.* God was not to be found in the external forms of religion when their lives lacked the vital power of godliness (II Tim. 3:5).

In much the same way, multitudes today are hurrying to hell busy-as-a-bee about the business of empty religion. They engage in, within certain limits, the same sins and abominable practices as the secular world. Witness the cussing “christians,” the alcohol-drinking “disciples,” the unfaithful “faithful,” the unclean “converts,” and the bogus “believers” that scurry to hear some smooth-sounding sermonette on any given Sunday. No, temple-goers will find no refuge from the wrath of God unless they sincerely turn from their sinful ways and return unto the Lord Jesus Christ with a heart of willing submission to God’s will (Acts 2:37). Dear reader, do you stand in this multitude that keeps holy day without a corresponding personal holiness? If so, thoroughly amend your ways (Jer. 7:3,5) and your doings in the sight of God by a repentant faith in the Lord Jesus before He executes the fierceness of His temporal and eternal wrath.

## ***Saved To Sin?***

*“Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by*

*my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations?” (Jer. 7:8-10); “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:9,10).*

Jeremiah’s contemporaries were not only chanting an almost fetish-like confidence in the temple complex, they also believed that their attendance upon the external acts of devotion insured them of ultimate salvation from Divine wrath, despite the fact that their lives remained fundamentally unchanged. This lamentable state of affairs is likewise the condition of most involved in contemporary religion. They profess that they know God, or make lofty claims of a special nearness to God, but in character and conduct they deny Him (Titus 1:16; Luke 6:46; James 1:22; I Jn. 2:4). Their practice does not match their profession. Their conduct does not coincide with their confession. Indeed, this glaring discrepancy between talk and walk is the bane of much church-life today, and becomes delusive when men are given false assurances of ultimate salvation if they *simply say they believe in Jesus!*

The temple-goers of Jeremiah’s day were quite the picture of religious confidence, but their confidence was ill-founded. For while they busied themselves with ritual, the storm clouds of God’s wrath were threatening and would eventually pour their angry contents upon the hypocritical worshippers. Sadly, many of Jeremiah’s countrymen thought that they were immune from such a deluge, simply because of their occupation with religion. They were relying upon the false assurances

of religious well-wishers, false prophets, who envisioned a future of peace for them, despite their woefully wicked lives. The false prophets of today whisper similar assurances, as they *“say still unto those that despise [God], The Lord hath said, Ye shall have peace” (Jer. 23:17)*. These people pleasing-preachers convince their hearers that once you become a Christian, you can never be in danger of God’s eternal wrath. *“Your salvation is secure; God may chasten, but He will never forsake!”* they proclaim. But in reality, many in their audiences, just as in Jeremiah’s day are on the brink of everlasting damnation because their superficial belief in Christ has never produced a thorough amendment of their lives!

### ***Remember Shiloh***

To illustrate the credibility of his warnings, Jeremiah turned the people’s attention to Shiloh, the central sanctuary in the days of the Judges, and the place where God originally revealed Himself to the boy-prophet Samuel (I Sam. 3:21). He, in essence, was saying, *“If you need further confirmation of the validity of my warnings, learn a lesson from Shiloh, and repent of your wickedness, lest Shiloh’s destruction become yours.”*

He warned—

*“But go ye now unto my place which [was] in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the LORD, and I spake unto you, rising up early and speaking, but ye heard not; and I called you, but ye answered not; Therefore will I do unto [this] house, which is called by my name, wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh” (Jer. 7:12-14).*

Interestingly, though the details of Shiloh’s destruction are not mentioned in Scripture, an archaeological dig conducted by the Danish Palestine Exploration revealed a city destroyed by the Philistines about 1050 B.C., thus confirming Jeremiah’s reference and the Scriptural account in Ps. 78:60-64 of its demise as a center of worship. God’s warnings of future judgment upon individuals and groups that refuse to repent are amply illustrated by historical examples. Noah’s age rejected God’s call through a preacher of righteousness, and the world that then was perished by water (II Pet. 2:5). Sodom and Gomorrah’s experiment with homosexuality incurred the vengeance of eternal fire (Jude 7). Mighty civilizations, such as Egypt, Assyria, Greece, and Rome have been reduced to rubble (Amos 9:8). These serve to demonstrate that God’s warnings are not idle threats. May Jesus grant us the grace to *“remember Shiloh”* and thoroughly amend our lives while His mercy is yet extended to heal our backslidings. *“For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings...then will I cause you to dwell in this place...forever and ever” (Jer. 7:5a,7a).*

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### ***Where Is The Lord?***

*“Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain? Neither said they, Where [is] the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt? And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination. The priests said not, Where [is] the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after [things that] do not profit” (Jer. 2:5-8).*

The nationwide revival under King Josiah had run its course, and its back-to-the-Bible emphasis had left but a fleeting impression upon the people of the southern kingdom of Judah. Now the inhabitants of the land stood at a crossroad (Jer. 6:16), amid the apparent confusion that so often accompanies the aftermath of revival. The season of refreshing had come and gone, but the nation was only marginally changed (Jer. 3:10; Hosea 7:14). In the wake of the superficial nature of the reforms under Josiah, the false prophets were busily plying their trade, fostering an empty optimism by generating illusions of peace in the hearts of their hearers. To make matters worse, the ancient people of Chaldea had arisen as a formidable threat in the region, and Judah seemed almost oblivious to the danger posed by this northern menace. In the midst of this religious apathy and