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Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

Go Now To Shiloh!

In Jeremiah 7:1–11, God instructs Jeremiah to stand right smack in the gate leading into the temple courtyard in Jerusalem, and call out a stern warning to all entering therein:

Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the Lord! Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!’ For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.”

The people had started to think of the Temple, and God’s presence within, as some sort of good luck charm. As long as they were called Jews, as long as

they presented their offerings there, God was forced to bless them. The people told themselves, “We can misbehave and we are still safe, because the Lord cannot reject His temple!” They thought God would never allow harm to befall the Temple. But they were wrong.

God presents proof, as He continued His message through Jeremiah,

Go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim (12–15).

“Shiloh” isn’t a common word to us, and so a little history is necessary here, to fully appreciate Jeremiah’s message. When God gave the Law to Moses, He said the people were not to offer sacrifices on any high hill, but only in that place where God chose to place His name (see Deut. 12:1–14). We all know that God eventually chose Jerusalem, (see 1 Kings 8:27–30, Neh. 1:9).

But Jerusalem wasn’t the first place God had chosen for His name to dwell. After Joshua conquered the promised land, through the period of the Judges, and all the way to the beginning of David’s time, God dwelt in a place called Shiloh (see Josh. 18:1, Judges 18:31, 1 Sam. 1:3). Now, Israel needed to remember what famous scene happened there!

Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and camped beside Ebenezer while the Philistines camped in Aphek. The Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield. When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh

the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies.”

So the people sent to Shiloh and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God... The Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, died.

You see, God’s people, even the priests, had sinned terribly in the years leading up to this battle. Yet they thought that the mere presence of the ark, like a good luck charm, would allow them to win the victory. God not only caused the people to be defeated, but the priests killed, and the ark of God stolen!

The ark never returned to Shiloh. Some time later, when the ark was returned to Israel, it made it no farther than the fields of Beth-shemesh and the house of Abinadab on a hill in Kiriath-jearim (see 1 Sam. 6:1–7:2); and it stayed until David finally brought it to Jerusalem (see 2 Sam. 6:1–4). During the intervening time, the city of Shiloh fell into disuse. The priests relocated from Shiloh to a little town called Nob (1 Sam. 22:11), and according to Bible scholars (see *ZPEB*, “Shiloh”) the whole city of Shiloh was destroyed by foreigners in 1050BC. Psalm 78:54–64 summarizes, saying, “He brought them to His holy land, yet they tempted and rebelled against the Most High God... They did not keep His testimonies ... so that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh.” The town of Shiloh became what it is to this day, an empty and desolate valley, with hardly a memory of the glorious ark of God that once resided there.

Thus, Jeremiah warned the worshippers that the presence of the Temple was no protection against judgment. Their attendance at worship would not substitute for their faith. Later, Jeremiah stood before King Jehoiakim and spoke the same warning, “...you have not listened ... I will make this house like Shiloh...” (Jer. 26:1–6). God

could dispense with the Jerusalem in the same way he had dispensed with Shiloh. Within just a few years, in fact, He removed His presence from the Jerusalem temple (Ezekiel 10:18–19) and the city was destroyed by the Babylonians.

Let the Church “Go Now to Shiloh”!

We never have God over a barrel. We are never so important to God that He cannot abandon the wicked and start over. We must never think, “I’m in the church, so I can do anything I want, and God must save me and accept me.” Learn the lesson of the captured ark. Membership does not excuse negligence, inactivity, bold-faced sin. The words “vengeance is Mine, I will repay” are addressed to Christians, not the world (Heb. 10:30–31). “If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb. 10:26–29). If we despise his grace, we can expect His wrath.

We must never echo the chant of the people of Jerusalem, “this is the church of Christ, the church of Christ, the church of Christ.” If this congregation stops reading and applying the Scriptures on a daily basis, the name over the door is no protection against the judgment of the Lord. Where is the church in Smyrna, in Laodicea, in Philadelphia? Go now to those places, and you will find empty fields. Their lampstands have been removed (Rev. 2:5).

God warns in 1 Peter 4:17, “it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” Let us be busy. Let us not be like individuals or whole congregations that are dwindling and dying, hoping that they will be saved by association. To the work!

—*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

“Don’t be afraid to take a big step if one is required. You can’t cross a chasm in two small jumps.”

—*David Lloyd George*