

False Kings, False Words and False Worship

What happens when we mix true and false worship? When we act religious but our hearts are far from God. As a way of introduction I am going to read I Samuel 15:10-33. You will recognize the story, for it is when King Saul rebelled and lost the kingdom.

¹⁰ The word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹ “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.” And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD all night. ¹² And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. And it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument for himself and turned and passed on and went down to Gilgal.” ¹³ And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, “Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” ¹⁴ And Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” ¹⁵ Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.” ¹⁶ Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night.” And he said to him, “Speak.”

¹⁷ And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸ And the LORD sent you on a mission and said, ‘Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ ¹⁹ Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the LORD?” ²⁰ And Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. ²¹ But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.” ²² And Samuel said,

“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to listen than the fat of rams.

²³ For rebellion is as the sin of divination,
and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has also rejected you from being king.”

²⁴ Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. ²⁵ Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may bow before the LORD.” ²⁶ And Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.” ²⁷ As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸ And Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than

you. ²⁹ And also the Glory of Israel will not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.” ³⁰ Then he said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may bow before the LORD your God.” ³¹ So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul bowed before the LORD.

³² Then Samuel said, “Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites.” And Agag came to him cheerfully. Agag said, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.” ³³ And Samuel said, “As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women.” And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

When kings disobey and refuse to do what is right, God can and will strip the kingdom away from them. The kings of our land should be very careful and choose to serve God in humility, righteousness and obedience. The keys to the kingdom are about to be ripped away from the Sauls of our land. They are false, filled with false and lying words, and offer God sickly, false worship.

Our main text today is taken from Jeremiah 7 and the theme is false worship. The text of Jeremiah 7 – 8:3 is typically referred to as Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon. It appears to be Jeremiah’s first public sermon. We will cover the first 20 verses of chapter 7 today. To give you a little context, at the end of the reign of King Josiah, the Temple became very prominent due to all the king’s reforms. Thousands of people would come to worship at the Temple. But King Josiah was killed when the Egyptians defeated Israel’s army, and this sermon was delivered in 609 B.C. at the beginning of the reign of King Jehoiakim. And what was about to happen? In just a few years King Nebuchadnezzar would defeat Egypt and take over Jerusalem. The exile was just around the corner and that is when Jeremiah started preaching.

It is not an understatement to say that Jeremiah was preaching at a time of national crisis. The nation was at a crossroads both spiritually and politically. It was time to listen to God and repent. And God faithfully sent his prophet with an unpopular but true message. And we should notice where God tells Jeremiah to go and preach. God tells him to stand in the gate of the Lord’s house. I should also note that when Jehoiakim was appointed by Pharaoh Neco to become king, a great reversal occurred. Many of the reforms Josiah had instituted started to unravel with the ungodly Jehoiakim.

The gate mentioned in the text would likely have been the gate that connected the outer and inner courts. By speaking at the gate it would ensure that a lot of people would hear the message as they came to worship. And what is the message from God by the prophet? What did he say? He told the people to repent! But not only that, he is saying that it does not do any good to come to worship God without humility and repentance. The message is clear and simple. Change your ways and your actions, and God will allow you to stay in the land. Let’s read Jeremiah 7:1-7.

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter

these gates to worship the LORD. ³ 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. ⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

⁵ “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, ⁶ if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, ⁷ then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

The message is not complicated – it is clear. We should be very cognizant of how serious worship of a holy God is. Think about it for a moment – there are those who go to Church every week. They come and socialize, they go through the routine, they catch up with friends. But what about God? What happens when we come to Church with such a cavalier attitude? Should we approach God like we approach other things, like going to the store, a ballgame, or other activity with a mediocre attitude? The fact is some of us approach other things with tenacity and passion – we yell and jump up and down at the game, but we just go through the motions at Church. At Church it is the same old, same old. This is just something we do because it is acceptable, it gets us friends, allows us to socialize, or even worse gets us business contacts. And some of us don’t even bother to come at all, we just watch it online! Is any of that what worship is supposed to be? God is holy, he is a consuming fire. We should approach his throne with reverence, awe, fear and trembling. But do we? We in America could use a message like Jeremiah’s. God says repent change your ways, change your actions and attitude. Entering God’s presence requires a measure of humility, reverence and fear. Do we actually believe God will allow us to prosper in this land when we have such a cavalier attitude toward him? Do we go to Church to have a deeper relationship with him or are there other reasons we are there? The message of Jeremiah 7 is that you cannot go to worship a holy God without repentance, without changing our ways and attitudes. We have forgotten who we are worshipping! In the book, *Fear of God*, written by John Bunyan, he writes, “The judgments that sometimes God hath executed upon men for their want of godly fear, while they have been in his worship and service, put fear and dread upon his holy appointments. . . This, therefore, should teach us to conclude, that next to God’s nature and name, his service, his instituted worship, is the most dreadful thing under heaven. His name is upon his ordinances, his eye is upon his worshipers, and his wrath and judgment upon those that worship not in his fear.” (Bunyan, *Fear of God*, 13-14)

Let’s take a look at a couple of examples. This is Leviticus 10:1-3:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’”

This is I Chronicles 13:5-14

So David assembled all Israel from the Nile of Egypt to Lebo-hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath-jearim. ⁶ And David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim

that belongs to Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD who sits enthroned above the cherubim. ⁷ And they carried the ark of God on a new cart, from the house of Abinadab, and Uzzah and Ahio were driving the cart. ⁸ And David and all Israel were celebrating before God with all their might, with song and lyres and harps and tambourines and cymbals and trumpets.

⁹ And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzzah put out his hand to take hold of the ark, for the oxen stumbled. ¹⁰ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he put out his hand to the ark, and he died there before God. ¹¹ And David was angry because the LORD had broken out against Uzzah. And that place is called Perez-uzza to this day. ¹² And David was afraid of God that day, and he said, "How can I bring the ark of God home to me?" ¹³ So David did not take the ark home into the city of David, but took it aside to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. ¹⁴ And the ark of God remained with the household of Obed-edom in his house three months. And the LORD blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that he had.

Is God serious about his worship? Are we?

Now, let's move back to Jeremiah 7, what does verse 4 say? "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.'" What is Jeremiah talking about? He is saying the temple and the land are no longer secure. The people are putting their faith in the Temple because it belongs to God. The people had a wrong theology. They believed they were protected, even in their sin, but they weren't. God's covenant included both blessings for obedience and judgment for disobedience. The people knew about the covenant, but for some reason believed God would protect them because of his holy Temple. But, the Temple was no longer holy. And God was about to judge his people for their rebellion. But before God ever does that what does he do? He warns – he sends his prophets to warn people. To call them to repentance so there can be restoration. Now, restoration will come, but that does not mean we will avoid God's corrective hand. We are in covenant with God, we get to experience two sides, his great love and blessing, but also his overwhelming holiness. God does not compromise – ever! He does not change. His righteousness is pure.

Now, to pull this into a modern context, we probably would not put our faith in a building or the Church in general – at least not in our time. But we do put our faith in other things, such as our work or job, our money or bank account, our accomplishments, our relationships, things we have done, and on the list goes. And that really is the same thing as what Jeremiah is talking about. Instead of a temple, for us it is something else we are putting in front of God. We excuse our sin and believe it will be ok. Jeremiah is preaching when the nation has already been taken over by Egypt, and in a few years it will be taken over by Babylon. And many of the people will go into exile. The crisis is imminent. Can we identify? Yes, I think we can. We live in a day of extraordinary wickedness and evil. Corrupt leaders, governments and cultures abound. And what does God tell us? Repent, because if you think what you are experiencing is bad, without true repentance things will get worse. The people in Jeremiah's day did not repent. But we today, can make a different choice. We can turn back to God. The truth is we need to repent and turn from our ways. If we do not and approach God and his worship with cavalier attitudes, it will not do

any good to worship at all. And not only that, God will correct us, severely if necessary. God will not honor rebellion in our hearts. We must do things his way.

Now, we must also be careful not to trust in deceptive words, such as, God will bless you, no matter what – wrong! God blesses obedience. His word makes that very clear. And here is my question for us. God told his people they must change to stay in their land, their inheritance. But they did not change and they were exiled from the land. So, can we expect to prosper in our land if we do not change? What is God telling us – I have sent my prophets to you and you did not listen. So, now, my people will go into exile. Think about it – are we not experiencing a judgment in our land today? Do we enjoy the same freedoms we once had? God is saying change your ways, change your attitude and actions, and I will bless you. But, if not, exile is coming.

Let's continue by reading Jeremiah 7:8-15.

⁸“Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹ Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹ Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. ¹² Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel. ¹³ And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, ¹⁴ therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵ And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.

So, the people go on sinning and then go to God's house to worship. And Yahweh is clearly saying this is not going to work. This is not the way of blessing or holiness. God will not honor this kind of disrespect. Now, I want to briefly deal with hypergrace because that is really what the passage is talking about. Hypergrace is a modern teaching that says we are covered by the blood of Jesus for our sins, which is true, but the teaching includes the idea that we do not need to confess our sins or repent. This, of course, is an obvious error. But in practice it can be very dangerous. The text of Jeremiah is saying just that, the people just go on sinning and believe they can come to God's house and be delivered and blessed. No! When you read the letters to the Churches in Revelation 2-3, Jesus tells 5 of the 7 to repent. James 5:16 tells us to confess our sins to one another and pray for one another that we may be healed. In the book, *Rediscovering Holiness*, by J. I. Packer, he deals extensively with repentance. Packer gives the example of rain flooding a road where the drainage system fails. He is saying the drainage system is like repentance, and allows us to draw close to God and live a life of holiness. He writes, “where real repentance fails, real spiritual advance ceases, and real spiritual growth stops short.” (*Rediscovering Holiness*, Packer, 111) Repentance is like weeding your garden, it gets all the junk out of the way so the garden can flourish. Packer writes, “The purity and uprightness of God's own character, and His judgments of value . . . are fixed and immutable. He cannot be other than hostile to individuals and communities that flout His law. He cannot do other than

visit them sooner or later in displays of retributive judgment, so that all His rational creatures may see the glory of His moral inflexibility.” (Packer, 123)

Packer goes on to say, “Because of God’s majesty as sovereign ruler of the universe, sin (lawlessness, missing the moral mark, failing to practice righteousness with all one’s heart and soul) is a major matter. Secular western culture, which has deliberately atrophied the sense of God’s majesty, finds this hard to believe, but it is so. (Packer, 123-124) Packer also discusses growing in grace, which he means to be growing in intimacy with God. He says there are signs of this growth. One of those signs is, “a growing passion for personal righteousness, with more acute distress at the godlessness and immorality of the world around, and a keener discernment of Satan’s strategy of opposition, distraction, and deception for ensuring that people neither believe nor live right.” (Packer, 173) In other words, Christians should be grieved and outraged at the sickness of our world, not participating in it and then going to worship as if all is well.

Moving back to the text, Jeremiah 12:7 states, “Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel.” So, what exactly is the prophet talking about? Well, Shiloh was between Jerusalem and Shechem. The Tabernacle of Moses was set up there. It was also where the Tabernacle was during the time of the Judges. But I think it is clear the reference is about what we find in I Samuel 4. Let’s read it.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek.² The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle.³ And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.”⁴ So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

⁵ As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded.⁶ And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, “What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp,⁷ the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “A god has come into the camp.” And they said, “Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before.⁸ Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.⁹ Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.”

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell.¹¹ And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. I Samuel 4:1-11

You see the sons of Eli thought if they took the ark into battle they would win. But they didn't – the ark was taken. Psalm 78:56-62 says:

Yet they tested and rebelled against the Most High God
and did not keep his testimonies,
⁵⁷ but turned away and acted treacherously like their fathers;
they twisted like a deceitful bow.
⁵⁸ For they provoked him to anger with their high places;
they moved him to jealousy with their idols.
⁵⁹ When God heard, he was full of wrath,
and he utterly rejected Israel.
⁶⁰ He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh,
the tent where he dwelt among mankind,
⁶¹ and delivered his power to captivity,
his glory to the hand of the foe.
⁶² He gave his people over to the sword
and vented his wrath on his heritage.

The city of Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines in 1050 B.C. The city was also destroyed when the Assyrians carried Israel into exile. It is foolish to think that just because we go to Church or have a certain building, or anything else that God will fight all our battles. If we are living in sin, there are consequences. Religious rituals will not save us. If the people of Jeremiah's day had gone to Shiloh, they would not find God's presence, only devastation.

The message of the first 15 verses of Jeremiah 7 is that corrupt hearts produce corrupt worship. And the only way to find relief from the cycle of destruction is to repent.

Now, before moving to the next section, I want to point out that Jeremiah 26 and Jeremiah 7 are dealing with the same sermon. In chapter 26 we see the results of the sermon.

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD: ²“Thus says the LORD: Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah that come to worship in the house of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a word. ³ It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds. ⁴ You shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you, ⁵ and to listen to the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not listened, ⁶ then I will make this house like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.’”

⁷ The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. ⁸ And when Jeremiah had finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, then the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold of him, saying, “You shall die! ⁹ Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, ‘This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?’” And all the people gathered around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

¹⁰ When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of the LORD and took their seat in the entry of the New Gate of the house of the LORD. ¹¹ Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, "This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears."

¹² Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. ¹³ Now therefore mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. ¹⁴ But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. ¹⁵ Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the LORD sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears." Jeremiah 26

So, as you can see this is likely referring to the same sermon as chapter 7, but here we see what happens after Jeremiah preached the sermon. In a way chapter 26 reveals a type of trial. Jeremiah is being tried and convicted – but what is his crime? Preaching the word of God. Why were the people so angry? Because to them, speaking about the Temple that way was like treason. The Temple had become a national shrine, like a lucky charm to protect them. The people were very offended by what Jeremiah said. Again, for the Jews, the Temple had become an idol. Instead of honoring and worshipping God, they worshipped the Temple. Now, I have already pointed out that is not typically what we worship today, but anything we put in front of God is an idol. And Yahweh was about to remove what they saw as so precious. God can do the same to us when we choose not to honor him. Now, I think Jeremiah 26 shows us something very important about preaching God's word. Number one, if we are God's spokesman, we have to say what he says, what he tells us to say. There is not optional, it is required! Also, Jeremiah does not try to defend himself. He simply says, the Lord sent him, repent and change your ways, otherwise do what seems right to you. He does not defend his actions except to say that God had sent him to speak to his people. This is very telling of Jeremiah. We do not have to defend, but we do stand by what God says, even when it is not popular or accepted. People get to choose if they accept what God says. The job of the prophet is to speak what God says and stand by it. People can choose to obey or not. In Jeremiah 26, Jeremiah is spared, but the people do not repent. Our job as God's mouthpiece is to tell the truth! God will handle the rest and the results.

Now, moving back to Jeremiah 7, let's read verses 16-20.

¹⁶ "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. ¹⁷ Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸ The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven. And they pour out drink offerings to other gods, to provoke me to anger. ¹⁹ Is it I whom they provoke? declares the LORD. Is it not themselves, to their own shame? ²⁰ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched."

Now, there is no way around it, this is a difficult bit of Scripture. Jeremiah is told not to pray for the people. As a comparison, Abraham prayed for Sodom (Gen. 18), Moses interceded for Israel in Exodus 32-33 when they made a golden calf, not to mention Daniel and Nehemiah and a host of other times when spiritual leaders prayed for the people of God. Yet, Yahweh here clearly says not to pray. In fact, this isn't the only time God says this to Jeremiah. The same command is given in Jeremiah 11:14 and 14:11. So, what is going on? Well, clearly things have gotten so bad that God is not going to answer the prophet's prayer. And I think it is evident that there are times when God is not going to listen to the prayer, even of a righteous person. Why? Because there are bigger issues and he is not in the business of rewarding rebellion. For example, will God hear when a nation is in severe rebellion and practicing wickedness? If there is not true repentance or obedience will God hear? Yahweh actually tell us the reason –idolatry. When Josiah was king, he reformed the nation and got rid of the gross idolatry. But this reformation did not change the people's hearts. After Josiah was gone, there was a revival of idol worship, including worshipping the Babylonian goddess of fertility, Ishtar. King Manasseh originally is the one who brought this rebellion to the people. Now, this practice had been revived. In verse 17, Yahweh tells the prophet, "Do you not see what they are doing?" They are worshipping a Babylonian goddess. The text includes the participation of men, women, and children, but in Jeremiah 44, it tells us the goddess was worshipped chiefly by women. Ishtar was a mother goddess.

Now, I want to stop here for a moment on the term used in the text, "Queen of Heaven". I have already noted it appears to refer to the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar. Ishtar was a goddess of love, sexuality and war. This deity is associated with the planet Venus. The reason I point this out is because in other text we might see "host of heaven" instead of queen of heaven. But the meaning is essentially the same; we are talking about worshipping the heavenly bodies, such as planets. This was strictly forbidden by God for good reason. When the women would bake the cakes they were made in the image of a star.

Now, we might think this is silly, worshipping a heavenly body, but it was very serious. God had repeatedly warned his people about worshipping the heavens instead of him. This is so serious that Yahweh tells the prophet not to pray for the people. Listen to verse 20. "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched." Idolatry is a violation of the covenant God has with his people, it is very serious.

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³"You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20:2-6

Whole families were worshipping Ishtar and God says that he will pour out his wrath. It will be like a fire that is not quenched – burning up everything.

Jeremiah's entire sermon is about false worship. Back in verse 2, the text says, "Hear the word of the Lord, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the Lord." God is incredibly serious about worship and idolatry. And he will have his way. We can do things his way or we can be consumed by our foolish choices. We live in a culture that takes God very lightly. This attitude is actually quite perilous. We live in an age that has trivialized God – downgraded him to a small little thing. Yet, he has not changed. There is nothing bigger, nothing more dangerous, nothing greater than God. Why on earth would we treat the worship of such a Being with a cavalier attitude. It is quite dangerous to do so.

Now, I am going to give two examples, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. Here is the reason for this – first, to show some balance, but also to show all my New Testament friends that God is holy all the way through the Bible. He did not become a marshmallow in the New Testament. He is a consuming fire in both Testaments. Now, let's consider Numbers 25.

While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. ² These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. ³ So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel. ⁴ And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." ⁵ And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you kill those of his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor."

⁶ And behold, one of the people of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the people of Israel, while they were weeping in the entrance of the tent of meeting. ⁷ When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and left the congregation and took a spear in his hand ⁸ and went after the man of Israel into the chamber and pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman through her belly. Thus the plague on the people of Israel was stopped. ⁹ Nevertheless, those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.

¹⁰ And the LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. ¹² Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace, ¹³ and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.'" (vs. 1-13)

So, what is happening? Well, basically Israel has fallen into idolatry. They were sacrificing to the gods of Moab. This meant sexual acts were apart of their religious practice. Clearly this angered Yahweh and he ordered the killing of the leaders. Then, the people are crying out because of their great sin and the punishment for it. And while this is taking place a man brings a woman back to his tent for a religious service in full view of everyone. Well, guess what? Phinehas, who

was the grandson of Aaron, leaps into action and kills both of them. This action stopped the plague God had sent on the people and the text says, “he was jealous with my jealousy.” God commends Phinehas’s quick action because it was an atonement for their sin. Is God serious about sin? Is he serious about worship? We are the ones who are cavalier. God is not! We often abuse his grace and do not realize how holy he is, and whose throne we are approaching.

There is another story, probably well-known to you, in the book of Acts. Let’s read Acts 5:1-11

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property,² and with his wife's knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles' feet.³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it.⁶ The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.

⁷ After an interval of about three hours his wife came in, not knowing what had happened.⁸ And Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much.” And she said, “Yes, for so much.”⁹ But Peter said to her, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.”¹⁰ Immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last. When the young men came in they found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband.¹¹ And great fear came upon the whole church and upon all who heard of these things.

The reason I am sharing both of these examples is to show how serious God is about rebellion. And to show the God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. In Jeremiah 7, the prophet at God’s command gives a scathing indictment for the people’s cavalier attitude toward worship, their idolatry, and immorality. We are absolutely no different – if Jeremiah were to show up today, in many churches the message would be the same. We are not taking God serious. We trivialize God and the spiritual life – and this is very dangerous! God’s grace often gets abused, but he is in charge and he will correct our cavalier attitude.

Several years ago Dr. R.C. Sproul wrote the incredible book, *The Holiness of God*. I highly recommend this book. In it Dr. Sproul discusses one of the college classes that he taught. He writes that the class had 3 papers and he explained to the students that there would not be any extensions for the due dates, except in extreme circumstances, such as a family emergency. So, there were 250 students in the class and when the first deadline came, 225 students turned in their paper. The other 25 full of fear begged forgiveness and asked for an extension. Professor Sproul extended mercy and allowed the students to turn in their papers late. The second deadline came and this time only 200 students turned in their papers on time. The other 50 students being a little less nervous this time, begged forgiveness and asked for an extension. Again, Dr. Sproul graciously granted their request, but warned them this was the last time an extension would be granted. So, you can probably imagine what happened with the third paper. When the due date came, only 150 students turned in their paper on time. The remaining 100 strolled into class and were very cavalier with Dr. Sproul. Guess what he did? He went down the roll and asked each

student if they had their paper. When the student said no, he told them you get an “F”. When one student complained and said, “That’s not fair”. Dr. Sproul replied, I don’t think you turned in your paper on time last time either, so that is 2 “Fs” for you. After this the students were much more respectful and they completely changed their attitude. (*The Holiness of God*, Sproul, 150-152) You see, when God corrects we tend to shape up. But he should not have to do that. We should obey him because we love him. Instead we often abuse his grace. His mercy will last for a while, but then he will correct.

Some of the language in Jeremiah 7 seems very harsh, but it is because their violation of God’s covenant was so severe. We often expect extraordinary grace no matter what we do – but that is not love.

The sin in our country is very great. We as a nation have moved very far away from God with our cavalier attitudes and gross sin. We worship everything but him with our lifestyles, social media accounts, and the latest news cycle. Our idols are endless. What will God do with such a rebellious lot? He will correct. Listen to what God says through the prophet.

⁸“Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹ Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? Jeremiah 7:8-10

What can we do? Well, first of all we need to repent and we do this with our whole heart. Remember Numbers 25 when God corrected – they cried out, they were broken under the God’s heavy hand. American evangelicalism tends to be very shallow –we need to desire a deep relationship with God. We should strive for holiness, not simple fixes.

After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the craftsmen, and the metal workers, and had brought them to Babylon, the LORD showed me this vision: behold, two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. ² One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. ³ And the LORD said to me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” I said, “Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten.”

⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁵ “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. ⁶ I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. ⁷ I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

⁸ “But thus says the LORD: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat Zedekiah the king of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. ⁹ I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive

them. ¹⁰ And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them, until they shall be utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.” Jeremiah 24:1-10

One of the greatest deceptions of our day is that we can mix the good with the bad. The Bible does not teach this. There are good and bad figs in our nation. God will bless and restore the good, even in an exile. The bad will be thrown away. Do not be deceived. God is on his throne and is about to swing the handle of justice. Restoration will come to those who love God and have developed a deep relationship with him. But to those who refuse to do that and continually practice idolatry, immorality, and approach God with cavalier worship – they will have a Number 25 experience. Cry out to God, get right with him. Jesus is coming, you had better get ready!