



**"Staying Or Straying"**  
**Rev. Lisa Kruse-Safford**  
**Jeremiah 2:4-13**  
**August 25, 2019**  
**9:15 AM Service**

Have you ever changed political parties?  
 How about sports teams? Has there ever been a Cubs' fan who turned White Sox fan?  
 Or a Bears' fan who started rooting for the Packers?  
 In my observations, it's not something commonly done, and if it is, it's not done lightly

Now, last week we began a 4 - week series on some of the lessons in Jeremiah and we looked at God's use of prophets to get a message across.

In Jeremiah, God's message comes because the people of Israel have changed who they call their god.

In today's passage, Jeremiah deals with that.  
 God makes an indictment  
 A reality-check more than a judgment.  
 It's an observation of what has happened

Let's listen for God's word:

**Jeremiah 2:4-13**

***<sup>4</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, you descendants of Jacob, all you clans of Israel.***

***<sup>5</sup> This is what the LORD says:***

***"What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me?***

***They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.***

***<sup>6</sup> They did not ask, 'Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness,***

***through a land of deserts and ravines,***

***a land of drought and utter darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?'***

***<sup>7</sup> I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce.***

***But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.***

***<sup>8</sup> The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD?'***

***Those who deal with the law did not know me;***

***the leaders rebelled against me.***

***The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.***

***<sup>9</sup> "Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the LORD.***

***"And I will bring charges against your children's children.***

***<sup>10</sup> Cross over to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar<sup>[a]</sup> and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this:***

***<sup>11</sup> Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.)***

***But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.***

***<sup>12</sup> Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD.***

***<sup>13</sup> "My people have committed two sins:***

***They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.***

It's either a heartbreaking question or a sarcastic one....

God asks, "What have I done wrong?"

Either way, it's a rhetorical question because the answer is obvious – nothing. God has done nothing wrong; God has done nothing which would have caused the people to turn from him.

Which then, of course, begs the question: then why did you turn away?

Why indeed? Why would the people of Israel to turn away from their God?

It's a good question, especially after remembering how God had kept all the promises, he had made:

- Delivering the Israelites from slavery
- Providing for them in the desert
- Bringing them into a land promised to their ancestors

After God had showed up time and time and time again to save and protect and provide....God is asking his people to acknowledge their actions by answering the question: why?

And the answer requires a bit of a history lesson:

It probably all started around 250 years before when King Ahab was persuaded by his wife, Jezebel, to encourage the worship of Baal.

### **1 Kings 16:**

***<sup>29</sup> In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. <sup>30</sup>Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. <sup>31</sup> He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. <sup>32</sup> He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. <sup>33</sup> Ahab also made an Asherah***

***pole and did more to arouse the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him.***

It didn't end well for Jezebel, but what she started had a lasting impact – so much so that not only Ahab, but in the 22 years of reign, the people also shifted to worshipping Baal instead of Yahweh...switching your god – it was something simply unheard of anywhere else.

A couple of things about this Canaanite god – Baal was considered the god of fertility and rain.

- It's a tempting for a people who live in a land where having water means life; it's a land where they had to store up water for their use for when the rains came infrequently. They would dig cisterns to store this water...into rock and plaster it to prevent leaking and water loss.
- It's a tempting: worship this god and there will be guarantees for your crops and your livelihood

We have to listen closely here....

Because we may be just as tempted as they were; drawn by other powerful forces:

    Tempted by politics to elevate a certain set of ideals over and against Jesus'

    Tempted by nationalism to elevate one people over another, denying that all are children of God.

    Tempted by wealth; to trust in its promises for security rather than the Lord's promise of:

    "therefore, I tell you do not worry about what you will eat, or what you will drink or what you will wear for the Lord knows you need all these things...consider the lilies of the field...."

Modern 'gods' that promise power and affluence and a comfortable future calling us to bow down and sacrifice for them and give ourselves over to them.

Or we may be tempted away from God by forces that are more emotional:

    Judgmentalism in the face of differences

    Doubts about God that are driven by lack of proof

    Disengagement from each other during times of disagreement

    Disengagement from God because of pain and suffering

Jeremiah reminds the people that the "other god" that is sought is nothing at all.

    There is no other god; it's not real

    It's a fruitless pursuit

    and ironically, putting ones hopes in Baal is like putting water into a "cracked cistern" – you lose the very thing you are seeking and needing

The same is true for us as it was for the ancient peoples:

    To go after an ideal that we think will serve our desires better

        Because we feel angry with or betrayed by God

        Or because we are wooed by the promises of something else

    It's all folly

    Jeremiah reminds us that discipleship is not whimsical

    We cannot casually follow the Lord, then go after another

Jeremiah's lesson long ago asks us: "where would we go if we left the Lord?"

Is there really anywhere else to go?

Is there really anything else that gives living water?

No, everything else are broken cisterns that can't hold water at all.

If we find ourselves tempted to stray from God like Ahab and all his followers, we should remember that God in Jesus Christ doesn't stray.

For God declares through Isaiah: I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.... (Isaiah 16:18-19)

God stays. May it always be the same with us.