

### Jeremiah Begins His Second Prophecy of Judgment

#### Jeremiah 3

**Jeremiah 3:1-5** - *“They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man’s, may he return to her again?’ Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me,” says the Lord. <sup>2</sup>“Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness; and you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness.*

*<sup>3</sup>Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot’s forehead; you refuse to be ashamed. <sup>4</sup>Will you not from this time cry to Me, ‘My Father, You are the guide of my youth? <sup>5</sup>Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end? Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able.”*

#### Background Notes

In Jeremiah 2 we discussed Jeremiah’s first prophecy of judgment about the kingdom of Judah. Judah was denounced for leaving her first love – for forsaking the Lord, who was the Fountain of Living Waters. Instead Judah turned to the broken cisterns of idolatry and immorality - but the broken cisterns of the pagan religions held no water. When Judah turned to the waters of the Nile (by looking to Egypt) and the waters of the Euphrates (by looking to Assyria), she found nothing there to quench her spiritual thirst.

In Jeremiah 3:1-5, Jeremiah concluded his first message by denouncing Judah as an immoral prostitute. In verse 1 he referred to the Law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which said that if a man divorced his wife and she married another man, the first marriage was over, even if the second husband died or divorced the woman. Should Judah, then, expect any other treatment from God, especially when she had not only left the Lord (her “husband”), but also had turned to many foreign idols (“lovers”), and to spiritual prostitution? Remember - we mentioned that those foreign pagan religions involved literal sexual immorality in the high places of the land (v2). Spiritually, Judah was like a harlot sitting by the road, soliciting for clients - and she was not ashamed (v3).

Therefore, in accordance with the stipulations of the Law in Deuteronomy 28, God had withheld the rain from the Land (v3). And in spite of her unfaithfulness, the people of Judah had the audacity to find fault with God for not being more of a “father” and “friend” to them (v4), and for continuing to be angry with them (v5). Judah failed to realize that the reason for God’s continuing discipline was their continuing sin of rebellion and unfaithfulness.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Israel and Judah had turned away from God and His grace in the past.

**Jeremiah 3:6-11** - *“The Lord said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: “Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. <sup>7</sup> And I said, after she had done all these things, ‘Return to Me.’ But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. <sup>8</sup> Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. <sup>9</sup> So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. <sup>10</sup> And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,” says the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Then the Lord said to me, “Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.”*

Verse 6 began Jeremiah’s second prophetic message to Judah, and continued through to chapter 6. This message was given in the days of King Josiah of Judah (v6). King Josiah reigned from 627 BC down to 609 BC. One of the greatest revivals of history took place in 621 BC, during Josiah’s reign. So if Jeremiah gave this message before Josiah’s revival, it could have laid the groundwork and paved the way for the revival. On the other hand, that revival was short-lived. Judah soon turned back again to her sins of idolatry and immorality, which led to her defeat and captivity in Babylon.

In verses 6-11, the Lord reminded Judah of what happened to her “sister kingdom,” the northern kingdom of Israel. The northern kingdom had turned away from the Lord to the idolatry of the foreign nations, including the sexual immorality and the fertility rites that were practiced on the high places. In His grace, God had been willing to take the northern kingdom back, but the people would not return (v7). As a result, God gave her a “certificate of divorce,” and allowed her to be conquered by the Assyrians (v8).

Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC, and many of the people were taken into captivity. In spite of this, the people of Judah (Israel’s “sister kingdom”) did not turn away from her spiritual adultery and its associated sexual immorality – even though they had seen God’s judgment on the northern kingdom. In fact, the people of Judah went further away from the Lord (v10-11). Israel and Judah had turned away from God and His grace in the past.

### 2. Israel and Judah will turn back to God and His grace in the future.

**Jeremiah 3:12-25** - *“Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: ‘Return, backsliding Israel,’ says the Lord; ‘I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,’ says the Lord; ‘I will not remain angry forever. <sup>13</sup> Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the Lord your God and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,’ says the Lord.*

<sup>14</sup> "Return, O backsliding children," says the Lord; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. <sup>15</sup> And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. <sup>16</sup> "Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the Lord, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. <sup>17</sup> "At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. <sup>18</sup> "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers.

<sup>19</sup> "But I said: 'How can I put you among the children and give you a pleasant land, a beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?' "And I said: 'You shall call Me, "My Father," and not turn away from Me.' <sup>20</sup> Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the Lord. <sup>21</sup> A voice was heard on the desolate heights, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; they have forgotten the Lord their God. <sup>22</sup> "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." "Indeed we do come to You, for You are the Lord our God. <sup>23</sup> Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains. Truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.

<sup>24</sup> For shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth - their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. <sup>25</sup> We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the Lord our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."

Verses 12-25 contain the good news about both northern Israel and southern Judah. In verse 12, notice that Jeremiah was to proclaim toward the north - toward the remnant left in the northern kingdom of Israel, and to the exiles who had been taken captive by Assyria. Look at how the grace of God is emphasized in these verses: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the Lord. 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the Lord; 'I will not remain angry forever' (v12). All the people of Israel had to do was acknowledge their sin and return to the Lord their God. And if they had done that, their gracious Father would have brought them home.

But although this return didn't occur in the past, it will take place in the future. This passage looks forward - not to the Church of today - but to the return of restored Israel in the future, leading up to the second coming of Christ. In those days, good spiritual leadership will be provided for restored Israel (v15). In those days, Israel will no longer be concerned about the presence of the Ark of the Covenant (v16), because **the Lord Himself** will be here, reigning over all nations from His throne in Jerusalem (v17)!

Notice, in verse 18, that all twelve tribes will be part of restored Israel - the house of Judah **and** the house of Israel from the north. This truth is emphasized in other prophetic Scriptures as well (such as Ezekiel 48). There are no "lost tribes" of

Israel. All twelve tribes are represented in the Jewish people today. We know that is the case, because the godly people of the northern ten tribes migrated south to be near the Temple when Israel divided in 931 BC. So people from all twelve tribes of Israel went into captivity in Babylon, and returned from Babylon 70 years later. And all twelve tribes are represented in the Jewish people today. In fact, there is evidence that there may be pockets of some remnants of the ten northern tribes still in existence today. They could have migrated for safety from the Assyrian takeover in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, or perhaps they are descendants of the captives from Israel who were scattered and resettled by the Assyrians.

Verses 19-20 describe the blessed position of restored Israel in the future - in spite of her terrible sins of spiritual adultery in the past. Their spiritual restoration will come about only because of God's grace!

In the high places, where idolatry with its immoral rituals had been practiced in the past, there will now be weeping, prayers of repentance, acknowledgement of past sins, and shame for former behavior (v21-25). And in His grace, the Lord will heal their faithlessness (v22). Israel and Judah will turn back to God in His grace in the future.

## Practical Application

### **Don't look for the Ark of the Covenant based on Jeremiah 3:16.**

Some folks today believe the Ark of the Covenant will be found in the future, based on Jeremiah 3:16. *"Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the Lord, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore."*

The folks who believe (based on this verse) that the Ark of the Covenant will be found in the future think that if restored Israel of the future no longer mentions the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord when the Lord returns, then they must have been mentioning it before the Lord returned. Thus the Ark of the Covenant must be in Jerusalem at that time.

But that argument could just as easily be turned around the other way. In other words, when the Lord returns, they will stop looking for the lost Ark of the Covenant. In fact, they don't even think about looking for it anymore – because the Lord Himself is there.

We don't know whether the lost Ark of the Covenant is still in existence or not - but - don't go looking for the Ark of the Covenant based on Jeremiah 3:16!