

Jeremiah Chapter 3

Verses 1-5

In light of Judah's persistent infidelity (Ezek. 16:26), the law that a man could not take back his divorced wife if she married another (Deut. 24:1-4), suggests that reconciliation with the LORD was impossible.

But the LORD still said, "Return again to Me".

Repentance is only possible when sinners know there is One who will forgive.

Jeremiah 3:1 "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? But thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD."

Attention is called to the Mosaic Law (in Deut. 24:1-4), which stipulates that a husband may not remarry a woman he has previously divorced due to some moral indecency.

Judah's plight was desperate.

Her spiritual harlotry had placed her in danger of legal divorcement; however, an invitation for Judah to repent and return to her divine husband had been given (e.g. verses 12-14).

God would still seek to win back His fallen "wife" (compare Isa. 54:6-8; Ezek. 16:53; Hosea 2:16 – 3:5).

"If a man put away his wife":

Such a man was not to take that woman as his wife again, after that she is defiled (Deut. 24:4), and be a scandal.

Jeremiah used this analogy to picture Israel as a harlot in the spiritual realm, with many lovers (i.e., nations; 2:18, 25) and idols (2:23-25; 3:2, 6-9).

Yet, the LORD would graciously receive Israel or Judah back as His "wife" if she would repent (3:12-14).

The reference of the husband and wife here, is most assuredly speaking of the ordinance in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (See below).

"When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favor in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give [it] in her hand, and send her out of his house."

"And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's [wife]."

"And [if] the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth [it] in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her [to be] his wife;"

"Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that [is] abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance."

The physical house of Israel (Jews), were the "wife" of God.

We have been studying how they had forgotten God, and started worshipping false gods.

This is spiritual adultery.

From the above Scripture in Deuteronomy, it seems God would not forgive them, and take them back; but God's love (Agape), is so much greater than man knows how to love.

God forgives them over and over, even though they have been unfaithful to Him.

Jeremiah 3:2 "Lift up thine eyes unto the high places, and see where thou hast not been lien with. In the ways hast thou sat for them, as the Arabian in the wilderness; and thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness."

The consciousness of guilt was, however, the only foundation of repentance.

And the prophet's work, therefore, in very tenderness, is to paint that guilt in the darkest colors possible.

Still keeping to the parable of the faithless wife, he bids Israel, as such, to look to the "high places" that have witnessed her adulteries with those other lords for whom she had forsaken Jehovah.

Like the harlots of the east, she had sat by the wayside, as Tamar had done (Gen. 38:14; compare also Prov. 7:12; Ezek. 16:31).

Not so much courted by her paramours as courting them.

"As the Arabian in the wilderness":

The Arabian is chosen as the representative of the lawless predatory tribes of the desert.

As they, like the modern Bedouins, lay in ambush, waiting eagerly for their victims, so had the harlot Israel laid wait for her lovers, and thus the land had been polluted.

"And thou hast polluted the land with thy whoredoms and with thy wickedness":

The land of Judea, where idolatry was so openly and frequently practiced, brought a load of guilt upon it, and exposed it to the wrath and judgments of God.

So the Targum explains, "thou hast made the land guilty with thine idols and with thy wickedness."

This is just saying, take a look and see your sins.

Look how unfaithful you have been to God.

Spiritual whoredom, or harlotry, is even more serious than physical whoredom.

It is like a contagious disease that overcomes the whole land.

He is also saying, you cannot deny it, it is everywhere for all to see.

Verses 3-5

God's chastisement meant that the life-giving "latter" [spring] "rain" had been "withholden."

Joel had given the same message (compare Joel 2:23 with Deut. 11:13-17; Jer. 14:3-6; Amos 4:7-8).

Nevertheless, repentance had not come.

Rather, Judah went on in its superficial religiosity without reality.

Feigning her faith, Judah kept seeking her pagan lovers, the false gods of the nations around her (compare 2:33-37).

Jeremiah 3:3 "Therefore the showers have been withholden, and there hath been no latter rain; and thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed."

Viz. by me, according to my threatening (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 28:23-24).

I.e. a drought sent upon thee, either as a punishment of thy wickedness, thus public sins bring public judgments.

Or as an aggravation of it; and then it must be understood, as it often is.

Notwithstanding the great drought; and this the words of the verse seem to favor.

“There hath been no latter rain”:

This, added to showers before mentioned, seems to imply there had been no former nor latter rain.

The former for the springing of the corn, the latter for the plumping and ripening it; this coming a little before harvest.

"Thou hadst a whore's forehead, thou refusedst to be ashamed":

For all this, thou didst still remain impudent and obstinate, as ashamed of nothing (Jer. 6:15).

Thus, proverbially expressed, because shame does first and mostly appear in the forehead.

Thus, antichrist's impudence is expressed (Rev. 17:5).

We see that God has not just sat idly by, but has withheld the rain as punishment.

A whore's forehead has a hardened look from committing much sin.

Repetitious sin has a way of making a person so hardened, that they soon get to where they know no shame.

Jeremiah 3:4 "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou [art] the guide of my youth?"

These words are either a confirmation and proof of that impudence with which these people are charged; for had they not been impudent, or had not a forehead like a whorish woman; or were they truly ashamed, they would have cried to the LORD henceforth.

Called upon Him; claimed their relation to Him; and owned up to His favors in time past.

Or, if they had not been impudent, they would not have dared from this time to have called God their Father and their guide, when they had so wickedly sinned against Him.

So this is a charge of hypocrisy and deceit, calling God their Father and guide, when they were at the same time worshipping idols.

Or rather are expressive of the wondrous grace and goodness of God towards His people, that had so highly offended Him, yet He expostulates with them and puts words into their mouths to return unto Him with, saying: "My father; I have sinned against thee, and am not worthy of the relation, yet receive me as a returning prodigal".

"Thou art the guide of my youth":

Or, "hast been":

I acknowledge God's favors I have received in times past, in spite of an aggravation of my sin; reject me not, but receive me graciously into Thy favor; see Hosea 14:2.

The Targum interprets the words as a prayer: "wilt thou not from this time pray before me, saying, Thou art my LORD, my Redeemer, which art of old?"

Or else they point to them their duty, what they ought to do from here on.

That seeing the LORD had withheld from them the former and latter rain for their idolatry, it compelled them to return to Him by repentance.

And to call upon Him, who had been their Father and their guide in time past, to have mercy on them, and avert His judgments from them.

This cry is from the sinner to the Father.

Fathers are more forgiving than husbands.

Perhaps this is why He is addressed as "Father" here.

Israel was the family of Jacob, while they dwelt in Egypt.

They became the nation of Israel on the journey to the Promised Land.

God had given His law to the nation of Israel when they were just formed.

He was their Guide, and their Instructor in righteousness.

They have wandered, but perhaps if they repent, God will take them back.

They should appeal to Him as a child would to a father.

Jeremiah 3:5 "Will he reserve [his anger] for ever? will he keep [it] to the end? Behold, thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldst."

The questions were such as might well be asked in the first burst of sorrowing though superficial repentance.

The implied answer was in the negative, "No, He will not keep His anger to the end."

Yet, so far, facts were against that yearning hope.

It will be noted that the word “anger” is not in the Hebrew.

It is, however, rightly inserted, after the precedent of Nah. 1:2; Psalm 103:9.

The words seem, indeed, almost a quotation from the latter, and (Jer. 3:4-5), may probably be looked on as cited from the penitential litanies in which the people had joined, and which were too soon followed by a return to the old evils (Jer. 2:1-13).

"Thou hast spoken and done evil things as thou couldest":

I.e., resolutely and obstinately.

That pathetic appeal to the mercy and love of Jehovah was followed by no amendment, but by a return to evil.

Here the first prophecy, as reproduced from memory, ends, and the next verse begins a separate discourse.

The big question is, will God forgive them?

The answer is “Yes, if they will truly repent”.

2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Verses 6-10

Marriage is so sacred in the eyes of God that He chose it as the Old Testament picture of His relationship with the people of Israel.

When Israel decided to worship other gods, this was considered “adultery” on her part, leaving God no choice but to issue a “bill of divorce” (3:8).

Verses 6-7

Here begins the first of four messages concerning Judah’s certain judgment (3:6–4:4; 4:5-31; 5:1-31; 6:1-30).

The first message constitutes a plea to avoid God’s judgment by expressing genuine repentance.

For “Israel” and “Judah” as “sisters” engaged in spiritual harlotry see Ezekiel Chapter 23.

Jeremiah 3:6 "The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen [that] which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot."

“Backsliding”:

See 3:8, 11-12, 14; see note of Prov. 14:14.

The LORD is explaining to Jeremiah exactly what He is angry about.

“Backsliding Israel”:

This is speaking of those who once knew God and have gone away (similar to the apostate church today).

It was not enough that they removed themselves from worshipping God, they sought false gods.

“Upon every high mountain and under every green tree”.

These were two favorite places for the worship of false gods in that day.

Jeremiah 3:7 "And I said after she had done all these [things], Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw [it]."

The call to Israel to return had been slighted, and Judah, the traitor or faithless, “one with falsehood,” had not taken warning from the sin or its punishment.

"Turn thou unto me":

The verb may be either the second or third person, I said, thou shalt return; or, I said, she will return, as expressing a hope rather than a direct return.

The latter seems, on the whole, the preferable rendering.

"But she returned not":

To fear and serve the LORD, but remained in idolatry, obstinate and inflexible.

"And her treacherous sister Judah saw it":

Her treachery and breach of covenant, as the Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic versions add, for explanation sake.

Judah, or the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, who were allied to the ten tribes by birth and by religion, and equally treacherous to God, the husband of them both, saw all the idolatry of Israel,

and the aggravations of it, and what followed upon it, namely, their captivity in Babylon, yet did not learn or take warning hereby.

Israel is spoken of as "she" in the verse above.

The church has always been spoken of as "she" as well.

The first "she" represents the 10 tribes of Israel.

Judah is the 2 tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

They are the "treacherous sister".

Jeremiah 3:8 "And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also."

"I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce":

Though God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), it is tolerated for unrepentant adultery (see notes on Matt. 5:32; 19:8-9), as indicated by this analogy of God's divorcing Israel for that continual sin in the spiritual realm.

God had divorced Israel but not yet Judah (compare Isa. 50:1).

Compare Ezra 10:3, where divorce is the right action of God's people to separate from idolatrous wives.

It appears that the captivity that came on the 10 tribes of Israel, happened earlier than the Babylonian captivity of the tribe of Judah, to show them what unfaithfulness to God would bring.

God still hoped they would repent and return to the worship of God.

They did not.

They were unfaithful too, just as the 10 tribes.

The same punishment would come to them.

The bill of divorce, meant God would no longer protect her and bless her as a wife.

He would put her away from Him.

Jeremiah 3:9 "And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks."

“Lightness”:

In the ethical sense of “levity.”

Apostasy was treated once more as if it had been a light thing (1 Kings 16:31).

The word is, however, variously interpreted, and the meaning of “voice,” or “cry,” in the sense in which the “cry” of Sodom and Gomorrah was great (Genesis 18:20), seems more satisfactory.

"That she defiled the land":

Polluted it with sin, involved it in guilt, and exposed it to punishment.

"And committed adultery with stones and with stocks":

That is, with images made of stone and wood, which they served and worshipped as gods.

And is the adultery or idolatry they are charged with, and by which the land was defiled.

This, by what follows, seems to be understood not of Judah, but of Israel.

We got into this in the previous lesson.

The stock was a part of a tree.

The idols were made of stone and wood stock.

Again, the adultery was spiritual.

Jeremiah 3:10 "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD."

Though the two tribes saw the lightness and filthiness of the sin Israel was guilty of, and how the land was defiled with it, the stupidity of it, and the punishment inflicted on account of it as they did not turn to the LORD wholeheartedly.

"Her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD":

There was a show of reformation in Josiah's time, but it was just a show.

There was no true, hearty, cordial repentance for the sin of idolatry, only a feigned one.

There was an outward removal of it, and reformation from it, but inwardly the desires of the heart were to it.

The good king, and some few others, were hearty in it, but the greater part played the hypocrite; the following scriptures proved the truth of this.

Judah did not learn a lesson from the 10 tribes of Israel.

They remained in their sin, disregarding the punishment that lies ahead.

"Feignedly" in the verse above, means an untruth.

The LORD is saying Judah had a form of Godliness, but it was not sincere.

They were still going through the motions of the sacrifices, etc.

They were worshipping idols all the time.

Jeremiah 3:11 "And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah."

Although the Israelites had the temple in Jerusalem and were ruled over by the house of David, "Judah" was guiltier because they had not learned from what had happened to "Israel" when God judged them by sending them into captivity years earlier.

The ten tribes had suffered greatly for their unfaithfulness to God.

It had been 100 years since they had gone into captivity.

Judah had things too good.

They had been blessed abundantly yet betrayed God.

Jeremiah 3:12 "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; [and] I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I [am] merciful, saith the LORD, [and] I will not keep [anger] for ever."

The prophet utters his message as towards the far land of Assyria and the cities of the Medes to which the ten tribes of Israel had been carried away captive (2 Kings 17:6, 23).

He had a word of glad tidings for the far-off exiles.

"Return, thou backsliding Israel":

It is hard to reproduce the pathetic penitence of the original, "Shubah", (withdrawal), "mashubah," (turn back, thou that hast turned away; return), thou renegade.

"I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you":

Literally, My face; the face so awful in its wrath.

"I will not keep anger for ever.":

With perhaps a latent reference to the hope held out in Hosea 3:5, and to the words which Judah had uttered in her hypocrisy Jer. 3:5, but which were truer of Israel.

God is forgiving.

He is loving.

He is long-suffering.

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

It appears that the 10 tribes' sins are less than those of Judah's, and God is offering them restoration.

Micah 7:18 "Who [is] a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth [in] mercy."

Jeremiah 3:13 "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD."

Which will be the evidence of thy repentance, without which you can not lay claim to any pardon (Prov. 28:13; Isa. 55:7).

This is spoken by way of limitation, lest the Israelites should fancy a too easy pardon from God's merciful nature.

Exhortations to repentance always accompany the exhibition of promises.

"Hast scattered thy ways to the strangers":

Viz (in other words), to other nations, or rather to other gods, or to idols, running here and there, up and down, like a light, impudent harlot.

Sometimes to one, sometimes to another, thus adding different superstitions.

"Hast scattered thy ways": (Jer. 3:6; 2 Kings 17:4, 9-10; Jer. 2:23, 25).

Feet, whereby we go on in our ways; a metaphorical metonymy.

"Ye have not obeyed my voice":

So your sin is not a sin of ignorance, but of obstinacy.

Shutting your ears against my counsels, which I sent you by my prophets for your reclaiming (2 Kings 17:13).

There is one condition to His forgiving them and restoring them.

They must admit their guilt and ask for forgiveness.

God must have our obedience to Him.

1 Samuel 15:22 "And Samuel said, Hath 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 hearken than the fat of rams."

To obey God is very little to ask in return for His blessings.

Jeremiah 3:14 "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion:"

"I am married unto you":

God pictured His covenant relationship with Israel as a marriage, and pleaded with mercy for Judah to repent and return.

He will take her back.

Compare Hosea's restoration of Gomer as a picture of God taking back His wicked, adulterous people.

Literally, it means "I took possession of you" (i.e., at the Exodus).

The verb here is often used of ruling and serves to remind wayward Judah of God's rightful headship over her in the marriage relationship.

The verb comes from the same root from which comes the name Baal.

A play on ideas may be intended here.

Did Judah chase after Baal (the pagan god)?

Her real "Baal," that is, her divine owner and LORD is the only true God, her husband.

Why should she seek a false master?

Despite Israel's divorce (verse 8), there had been no second marriage or divorce (see note on verse 1).

Therefore, a loving and forgiving God would still seek His fallen wife.

We see that the salvation offered is to individuals.

He will accept one at a time, or a whole village.

They do not all have to come.

Those who come, will receive His blessing.

This is very much like Christianity.

Salvation is offered to the masses, one at a time.

God saves individuals in those masses.

“Zion”:

Can be the holy mountain, or symbolically mean the church.

Verses 15-18

“And it shall come to pass”:

When Israel repents (verses 13-14, 22), which has not happened, but will in the millennial era of God's restoration that the prophets often describe (Jer. 23:5-6; 30-33; Ezek. Chapter 36), God will bring these blessings:

- (1) Shepherds to teach them the truth;
- (2) His own immediate presence on the throne in Jerusalem, not just the Ark of His Covenant;
- (3) Allegiance even of Gentile nations;
- (4) Righteousness;
- (5) Genuineness in worship;
- (6) Unity of Israel (north), and Judah (south), into one kingdom; and
- (7) Reestablishment in their own Promised Land.

Jeremiah 3:15 "And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

The promise of restoration to a repentant people is a common one in the prophets, and Jeremiah turns to it often.

“Pastors” means Israel’s leadership which, though now false (compare Ezek. 34:8-10), will yet be composed of men after God’s own heart (compare 23:4), serving under the Great Shepherd Himself (Ezek. 34:11-31).

The pastors are to feed them spiritual food.

Notice it is knowledge and understanding of God they will be taught by the pastors.

God will choose the pastors.

Verses 16-17

Words of great hope are also contained in God’s words of judgment.

Here a future was envisioned in which the “ark of the covenant” would no longer have a central role because the “name of the Lord”, His presence, would be in “Jerusalem”.

Jeremiah 3:16 "And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit [it]; neither shall [that] be done any more."

The “ark,” once the central feature of Israel’s worship, will give way to that which it symbolized, the actual presence of a holy and sovereign God in all His glory.

The ark itself is last mentioned (in 2 Chron. 35:3).

It was probably taken away to Babylon at the fall of Jerusalem.

This is speaking of the time when the law will be replaced by grace.

The ark was the resting place for the law of God.

Jesus (their Messiah), will bring in the age of grace.

Jesus fulfilled the law in His life, crucifixion, and resurrection.

There would be no need for further sacrifice.

This is why they would not talk about the ark anymore.

Jeremiah 3:17 "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart."

That is, the Gospel church, the heavenly Jerusalem, the Jerusalem above, that is free.

Which is Christ's kingdom, where He has His throne and subjects, and where He sits and reigns as King of saints.

And where they yield a cheerful and ready subjection to Him, signified by calling the church His throne.

"And all the nations shall be gathered unto it":

Which shows that Jerusalem, literally understood, cannot be meant, but the church of Christ.

To which the Gentiles, being converted, should join themselves in great numbers in all nations, as they have done.

And which will be more largely accomplished and verified in the latter day (Isa. 2:2).

"To the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem":

To name His name, to trust in His name.

To call upon it, and to worship Him in Jerusalem, in His church, and among His people.

And so the Targum explains, "and all nations shall give themselves to worship the name of the LORD, in Jerusalem:"

"Neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart":

For the Gospel being preached to all nations, according to Christ's commission, by the pastors He promises, and that being blessed to the turning of the Gentiles from their idols to serve the living God, they shall no more worship the gods they chose for themselves, and their evil hearts devised.

From the time of the LORD, Jerusalem has been the spiritual center of the world.

Jerusalem in the sense it is used here, could be speaking of the church of the LORD.

This will be the time when God's law will be in their hearts, not on tablets of stone.

All who love God will be drawn to fellowship in the church.

Galatians 2:20 "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Jeremiah 3:18 "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 for an inheritance unto your fathers."

For the future reunion of "Israel" and "Judah," see Isaiah 11:12; Ezek. 37:16-28; Hosea 1:11.

This is really speaking of the time when the physical and spiritual house of Israel come together in Jesus Christ.

The following Scriptures are speaking of the same thing.

Ezekiel 37:20-24

"And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes."

"And say unto them, Thus saith the LORD GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:"

"And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all:"

"Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God."

"And David my servant [shall be] king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them."

David (in verse 24), is of course, speaking of Jesus.

We will all be saved by Jesus and in Jesus.

Jeremiah 3:19 "But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me."

The literary figure changes here from that of “husband and wife” to a “father and his son”.

The Old Testament portrays Israel as God’s redeemed son (Exodus 4:21-23; Hosea 11:1), from whom He had a right to expect conduct befitting a son (Mal. 1:6; 2:10).

Unfortunately, Israel had proved to be a wayward son (Deut. 32:5-6), whom God must chastise (Isa. 63:7-10).

However, God still loves His child and longs for his repentance so that after the judgment has been rendered, he might return to the place of blessing (Isa. 43:6).

Ultimately that will be accomplished through God’s special son, David (Psalm 89:20-27), through whom the Greater Son of David will come with full salvation (Psalm 2:7-12; Ezek. 26:24-32; 37:20-28; Luke 1:68-75; Acts 13:22-24).

“Put thee among the children”:

Here is a reference to adoption into God’s family, when the people turn back from idols to acknowledge Him as “Father”.

Notice “nations” is plural.

This is speaking of those from all nations who accept Jesus as their Savior.

Galatians 3:8 "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, [saying], In thee shall all nations be blessed."

Revelation 7:9 "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;"

These are the saved in Christ.

Jeremiah 3:20 "Surely [as] a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD."

“A wife treacherously departeth”:

Hosea had earlier used the same imagery (ca. 755-710 B.C.).

Thus, God had given the divorce because Israel committed spiritual adultery and was unrepentant.

But when repentance comes, He will take Israel back (compare 3:1).

“O house of Israel”:

Since the irretrievable dispersion of Israel in the north (722 B.C.), Judah alone was left to be called by the name Israel, as Jeremiah sometimes chose to do (e.g., 3:20-23).

Now this has jumped back to the physical house of Israel (Jews), who have been unfaithful to God.

God is reminding them of their unfaithfulness.

Verses 21-25

Although Jeremiah must pronounce God's message of judgment, he so longs for his people's repentance and restoration to favor that in the scene played out in his mind's eye he joins with them in confession and contrition.

Jeremiah gives us a lesson in "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), and in feeling concern.

Jeremiah 3:21 "A voice was heard upon the high places, weeping [and] supplications of the children of Israel: for they have perverted their way, [and] they have forgotten the LORD their God."

And so might be heard afar off; it shows that the repentance and confession of the Jews, when convinced and converted, will be very public, and made upon those places where they have committed their sins (see Jer. 2:20).

For this and the following verses declare the humiliation, repentance, and conversion of the Jews, and the manner in which they shall be brought to it, and be openly put among the children.

"Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel":

Not so much lamenting their calamities, as mourning over their sins.

Supplicating the pardon of them, and freely and ingenuously confessing them.

"For they have perverted their way, and they have forgotten the LORD their God":

Or, "because they have", etc.

This they shall be sensible of, that they have perverted the right ways of the LORD by their traditions, and have forgotten the worship of the LORD.

As the Targum paraphrases it; yea, the LORD himself, their covenant God and kind benefactor, and lightly esteemed of the true Messiah, the Rock of their salvation.

The consideration of which will cause them to weep and mourn; which they will do when the Spirit of grace and supplication is poured out upon them.

And they shall look upon him whom they have pierced (Zech. 12:10).

Some interpret this as the cause of their calamities, and not as the subject matter of their mourning; but the latter seems best to agree with what follows, which shows by what means they were brought to repentance, and were converted.

This is in the area where the practice of idolatry was.

Now this is the very place they cry and repent of their unfaithfulness to God.

Jeremiah 3:22 "Return, ye backsliding children, [and] I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou [art] the LORD our God."

The word "backsliding" literally means "turning back" or "turning away."

Although it occurs throughout the Old Testament, Moses and Jeremiah especially use it to describe Israel's failure in their covenant relationship with God.

Backsliding implied a stubborn and rebellious attitude on the part of ancient Israel and may have referred either to their forsaking the covenant (in whole or in part), or to their failure to grow spiritually according to God's progressive revelation.

The term is often applied today to Christians who have fallen into sin, but it could also apply to those who have failed to grow spiritually (compare Paul's use of carnal in 1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The cause of backsliding is the desire to do things our way rather than God's way (Prov. 14:14).

Christians should be careful to follow the LORD and grow in grace so as not to backslide (Jer. 3:6; 3:22; compare Lev. 2:11).

God is inviting them back, if they will repent and return to Him.

The last part of this is the people answering, and promising God they will return to the One true God.

Jeremiah 3:23 "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."

From any natural defense, by hills and mountains encompassing, or from idols worshipped on hills and mountains.

So the Targum explains, "truly in vain we worship upon the hills, and for no profit are we gathered upon the mountains."

And to this purpose Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it; or from the multitude of the people, the kingdoms of the world, and the nations of the earth, from whom the Jews have in vain expected salvation and deliverance.

“Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel”:

Or, is in “the Word of the LORD our God”, explains the Targum.

In Christ, the essential Word of God, is the salvation of all the chosen people, both Jews and Gentiles.

It was put into His hands by His Father, and it is wrought out by Him; and it resides in Him, and it is to be had in Him, and in Him only (Acts 4:12).

Who is God the LORD, and therefore was able to effect it, and to give it; and hence these repenting ones, discarding all other saviors, apply to Him for it.

There is no salvation in the worship of idols or false gods.

Jesus is salvation for all mankind.

Pagan worship on the mountains had brought no help at all.

In fact, it had angered God.

Romans 3:24 "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:"

Ephesians 1:7 "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;"

Hebrews 9:12 "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption [for us]."

There is no redemption in anyone or anything but Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 3:24 "For shame hath devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters."

That is sin, which is the cause of shame, and of which sinners ought to be ashamed, and will be sooner or later.

So, the Targum renders it, "the confusion of sins".

And the Jewish writers generally interpret it of idolatry, and of the idol Baal.

As Kimchi and others, called "shame", or that "shameful thing" (Jer. 11:13).

This idol, because of the multitude of the sacrifices offered to it, consumed what their fathers labored for, ever since they had known them.

Or, for their worshipping of this idol, such judgments came upon them as consumed all they got by hard labor.

Or rather it may regard their shameful sin of rejecting the Messiah, and crucifying Him; which they will be ashamed of at the time of their conversion, when they shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and on account of which they suffer the many calamities they now do.

"Their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters":

Whatever evils have befallen them in their persons, families, and estates, they will confess are owing to sin they have committed, of which they will now be ashamed; hence it follows:

All of this had been taken away, because of their unfaithfulness to God.

All they had worked for was gone, because they committed spiritual adultery.

Jeremiah 3:25 "We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God."

As persons overwhelmed with a sense of sin, and so pressed with the guilt of it on their consciences, that they can neither stand up, nor look up.

But throw themselves on the ground, and cover their faces, being ashamed of what they have done.

"For we have sinned against the LORD our God":

As by breaking the law of God, so by despising the Gospel; rejecting the ordinances of it; disbelieving the Messiah, and speaking reproachfully of Him and His people.

"We and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day":

In a long series of years, from the time that Christ was upon earth, to the day of their conversion, to the latter times of the Gospel dispensation.

"And have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God":

The voice of His forerunner, John the Baptist, of the Messiah Himself, and of His apostles, and of His ministers since.

So, the Targum explains, "and have not obeyed the Word of the LORD our God."

It seems that God's people have finally realized that they brought the destruction upon themselves by worshipping false gods.

They lie down defeated.

They realize they cannot help themselves.

The very first step to restoration, is to repent and ask for God's help.

They realize here they have sinned.

They realize they have disobeyed God.

They are ashamed of what they have done.

God loves a humble heart.

He will rescue them from their despair.

Jeremiah Chapter 3 Questions

1. What ordinance is verse 1 speaking of?
2. Who is the harlot in verse 1?
3. Who were the wife of God?
4. What had they done wrong?
5. What is the name for God's love?
6. How does it differ from man's love?
7. What is more serious than physical whoredom?
8. What had been withholden, because of their sin?
9. How does a whore's forehead look?
10. Why do they feel no shame for their sin?
11. Fathers are more forgiving than _____.
12. When did the family of Jacob become the nation of Israel?
13. What is the big question in verse 5?

14. What kind of Israel did He call them in verse 6?
15. What is this like today?
16. Why did He mention "under every green tree"?
17. What was Judah called in verse 7?
18. Why had God put her away?
19. When Judah saw Israel fall, what did they do?
20. What does the word "feignedly" mean?
21. What was God saying about Judah?
22. In verse 11, Judah is described as being _____.
23. God is _____, _____, and _____.
24. What did God want them to do in verse 13?
25. Salvation is offered to _____.
26. What is Zion symbolic of?
27. What are the pastors to do?
28. What time is verse 16 speaking of?
29. Why would they remember the Ark no more?
30. Where will be called the throne of the LORD?
31. What 2 houses will walk together in that day?
32. What does the author believe this is referring to?
33. Does Israel repent?