

Jer. 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.

This chapter starts out with what seems to be a reference to some verses in Deuteronomy.

*Deuteronomy 24:1–4 “When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour 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.**”*

I think the LORD is declaring that the scenario between God and His people is even worse. This wasn't an issue of divorce and remarriage, but an issue of adultery with many lovers.

The last part of this verse could be taken either of two ways. The NIV offers this explanation that makes good sense to me: “The verb ‘return’ in the last line of v. 1 may allow for more than one rendering. If it is taken as an imperative, then the Lord is calling the nation to penitence in spite of the gravity of her sins. If the clause is interpreted as a question, then the sense is “Would you now return to me [in spite of all you have done]?” ...It is hard to see, however, how the Lord would be declaring a reconciliation impossible when, throughout the remainder of the chapter, he is pleading for that very thing in urging Judah to repent. Even the question form of the last clause can be understood to impress Judah that it would be no light thing, considering her many offenses, for God to reclaim her. God is not indignantly rejecting the possibility of her return. We must never forget that God, as he wills, exercises grace beyond the law. Ruth was a Moabite woman and was excluded from Israel (cf. Dt 23:3); how then does she become the ancestress of David and of the Lord Jesus? God operated by grace beyond the law. So God was ready to forgive Judah in spite of all her past failures. Legal claims to the contrary, God calls Judah to the solution to her predicament—namely, repentance.”

Jer. 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.

Jer. 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.

The LORD continues to declare through Jeremiah the public display of their

spiritual adultery. He challenges them to look around and see if they can identify a spot that had not been polluted with their idolatry. As I read through the other translations, it seems to be comparing the people to a prostitute on the side of the road seeking to find partners.

The LORD is declaring that the lack of spring rains is a result of the blatant display of their adulterous ways and their refusal to be ashamed of them. (6/11) This is just one of many examples in scripture in which God makes use of the forces of nature to judge sin.

Jer. 3:4 *Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?*

Jer. 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 couldest.*

In spite of their complete disdain of God and His law, they have called out to Him as Father and Friend of their youth. They are basically saying, "Are you really going to stay mad at me forever?" Even as they call out to God, they continue in their evil ways. They are acting like spoiled, petulant children playing on their father's love and expecting to get their way without changing their disobedient ways.

Jer. 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.*

Jer. 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.*

Jer. 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.*

Jer. 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.*

Jer. 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.*

Jeremiah now records a message the LORD gave him during the reign of Josiah as king. The LORD basically asks Jeremiah if he is aware of Israel's adulterous worship of false gods. He goes on to relate how He had sent His prophets to encourage her to repent, but she did not. This truth is affirmed in 2Kings.

2 Kings 17:13–14 "Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God."

Judah was witness to these events also. Even after being allowed to witness God's action against Israel, divorcing her and sending her into captivity in the

lands of the false gods she worshipped, Judah did not benefit. She fearlessly and blatantly went on to play the harlot in worship of false gods and their idols of wood and stone also. The people of Judah evidently pretended to repent, but their actions proved otherwise.

This is an especially sad observation in light of the wonderful spiritual leadership that Josiah provided as king. 2Kings 22-23 record how he took action to repair and restore the temple and cleanse it of idolatrous vessels, to have the book of the law read publicly to the people, to renew covenant with the LORD, to tear down the high places of idol worship, to eliminate sacrifice to Molech, and more.

One other observation, these and the following verses identify Israel as God's wife even as "the church" is identified as the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 5:22–25, 31-32 "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.... For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church."

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

Why does the LORD declare Judah to be worse than Israel in her sin? Because she refused to repent in spite of the witness of God's dealings with Israel.

Jer. 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.

Jer. 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.

Jer. 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:

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

The LORD tells Jeremiah to send a message to the people of Israel calling for them to repent and put themselves at the mercy of God. Though He is righteous to judge, it is not His intent to break all relationship with His people forever. All the LORD asks is that they admit their sin and disobedience and repent. God is unchanging and He deals with His people the same way today.

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."

The LORD goes on to plead with them as their Husband and declare His marriage still valid with those who choose to repent and follow Him as LORD—even if by ones and twos. The word for "married" in the Hebrew makes reference to being master and having dominion over them as a husband. This is another affirmation of the unconditional nature of God's covenant with Abraham in spite of the rebellion of his progeny.

He then promises to bring them back to Zion and give them *shepherds* (from the Hebrew for *pastors*) who love the LORD and will nourish them spiritually with knowledge and understanding of God and His law. (6/11) I think this is looking forward to the millennial kingdom.

Jer. 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.

Jer. 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.

Jer. 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.

At this point the message makes one of those prophetic leaps over time. This is evident since it is describing a time when the nation is once again whole and walking no more after the imagination of their evil heart. It is a time in which the ark of the covenant will have no significance to them since the Lord will be on His throne in Jerusalem. This is obviously talking about the 1,000-year reign of Christ as King of kings spoken of in Revelation, the Messianic Kingdom.

Revelation 20:4 "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

Other prophets declare this as a time when the people of Israel would fill the land and experience great blessing. Ezekiel joined with Jeremiah in foretelling of this time of God's restored relationship to His people.

Ezekiel 11:17–20 "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. And they shall come thither, and they shall take away all the detestable things thereof and all the abominations thereof from thence. And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes,

and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Ezekiel 36:24–28 "For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Jer. 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.

Jer. 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.

The people of Israel/Judah could have been enjoying those blessings during Jeremiah's day, but they had chosen to be unfaithful to their covenant with the LORD.

Deuteronomy 28:1–2 "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God."

God's desire was that they would trust Him as a Father and obey Him in love, but they chose instead to break His heart and reject His love. God was not surprised at their actions, however; He had foretold it all through His servant Moses.

Deuteronomy 32:15–18 "But Jeshurun [Israel] waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not. Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee."

Jer. 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.

Jer. 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 LORD acknowledges that He can hear the weeping and prayers of His people because of their sorrows and troubles—a result of their perverted, sinful

ways and rejection of God as LORD.

Evidently, they are crying out without repentance. "Return" in the Hebrew references returning to their beginnings—to repent. If they will but repent, God is ready to heal them, to restore them and make them whole again. True repentance will be reflected in hearts that have yielded to God as LORD in their lives.

Jer. 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.

The prophet is emphasizing that the LORD God is the only trustworthy defender of Israel. There is no deliverance to be found in the idols they worshipped in the high places, the hills; nor can they depend upon the power of other kingdoms (such as Egypt and Assyria) and their many gods to protect them from their enemies.

Mountains are sometimes used to represent kingdoms in the scripture, and I think readily applies in this instance.

Daniel 2:35&44 "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.... And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."

*Jeremiah 51:24–25 "And I will render unto **Babylon** and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD. Behold, I am against thee, **O destroying mountain**, saith the LORD, which destroyest all the earth: and I will stretch out mine hand upon thee, and roll thee down from the rocks, and will make thee a burnt mountain."*

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

Jer. 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.

It sounds like the prophet is expressing his heart in these verses and the preceding verse. He is declaring that they should be ashamed at the folly of their fathers in turning to worship idols in rejection of Almighty God. As part of that worship they had sacrificed flocks and herds as well as sons and daughters in sacrifice to those false gods. The prophet is saying that they can't lay all the blame at the feet of their fathers; they, too, had chosen to follow the example of their fathers. They had chosen to disobey the voice of the LORD as declared through His prophets and the scripture. (see 2Kings 17:13-14 quoted above) This is an important truth in scripture. Each person is accountable for his/her

own sin. God is very clear in reiterating that truth through Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 18:20 "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Ezekiel 18:30 "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."