

Jeremiah

Chapter 3

If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her? Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? declares the LORD. 2 Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see! Where have you not been ravished? By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your vile whoredom. 3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and the spring rain has not come; yet you have the forehead of a whore; you refuse to be ashamed. 4 Have you not just now called to me, 'My father, you are the friend of my youth— 5 will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?' Behold, you have spoken, but you have done all the evil that you could."

3:1 *If ... divorces.* Cf. Dt 24:1–4.† The law of Moses did not allow a man to remarry a divorced wife after her marriage to another. Yet the Lord will take back unfaithful Israel. (CSB)

The Law of Moses did not allow a man to remarry the wife he divorced after she had married another man. According to human standards, God could not be expected to let Israel return to Him after they defiled themselves with other gods. But forgiveness is not a mere possibility; God pleads with sinners to receive His mercy. (TLSB)

3:2 *bare heights.* Places where pagan gods were consulted and worshiped (see v. 21; 12:12; Nu 23:3). (CSB)

Judah has committed idolatry everywhere. The shrines to false gods were usually built on suitable, open high places. (PBC)

By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers. The connection of this imagery with ritual prostitution is made explicit in Eze 16:25. (CSB)

like an Arab in the wilderness. Waiting in ambush to waylay a traveler (see Lk 10:30). (CSB)

As a desert marauder was always on the alert for victims, so Israel eagerly sought out every opportunity to be ravished by other lovers. (TLSB)

3:3 *showers have been withheld.* See 14:1–6; Am 4:7–8. This is the reverse of God's gracious response to his people in Hos 2:21; 6:3. (CSB)

The early rains came in October and lasted through December. These rains softened the soil for plowing and planting, and gave the crops a good start. The late rains or spring rains came in late February and March and filled the crops out. Both rainy seasons were essential for a good crop. The people of Judah had experienced drought and famine, but still they did not know the reason. (PBC)

forehead of a whore. Prostitutes did not blush as other women would. (TLSB)

you refuse to be ashamed – To feel shame and repentance over the course which she had pursued. On the contrary, Israel speaks in a confident and presumptuous voice to the Lord, even in a tone of gentle rebuke for the undeserved severity exhibited by Him. (Kretzmann)

3:4 My Father. Compared to the NT, the title “Father” for God is relatively rare in the OT. However, it often occurs in personal names—compound names that begin with Abi- (e.g., Abinadab and Abiram) refer to God as “(my) Father.” (CSB)

Fatherly chastisement in the form of drought did not keep Israel from plunging into sin. They profess filial love but do not live out their words. (TLSB)

friend of my youth. Claiming intimate association (see Ps 55:13; Pr 16:28; 17:9; Mic 7:5); perhaps even claiming to be the Lord’s faithful wife (cf. Pr 2:17). (CSB)

She uses the endearing term “Companion of my youth,” in speaking to the Lord, as though to win Him back. (Kretzmann)

3:5 Will he be angry forever? Not if God’s people repent (vv. 12–13). (CSB)

They went on as if nothing had happened. Outwardly, they worshiped the Lord as before. They continued to claim a special relationship to Him. They reminded Him of His promise to Abraham, whose descendants they were. But they did all the evil they could. Under such conditions could the Lord forgive them? (PBC)

Israel implies that her misfortune, by which she was receiving an everlasting mark, was due entirely to the Lord’s unreasonable anger. (Kretzmann)

done all the evil that you could – While speaking these words of pleading endearment, Israel had continued on the way of wickedness. Such is ever the way of hypocrisy, to profess an affection for the Lord which these false people are far from feeling. (Kretzmann)

2:1–3:5 Through Jeremiah, God files charges against His people for breaking covenant with Him. He uses the powerful image of marital unfaithfulness—a capital crime under Mosaic Law—to drive home the seriousness of the charge. God grants time for sinners to repent, but those who refuse to do so will face His justice. His ultimate goal is always our salvation, which He accomplished through the life and death of His Son, who bore His judgment for our sins. • Keep us ever faithful to You, O Lord, by Your Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

Faithless Israel Called to Repentance

6 The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah: “Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? 7 And I thought, ‘After she has done all this she will return to me,’ but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. 9 Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. 10 Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD.” 11 And the LORD said to me, “Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. 12 Go, and

proclaim these words toward the north, and say, “Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever. 13 Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the LORD your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the LORD. 14 Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. 15 “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. 16 And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. 17 At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. 18 In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage. 19 “I said, How I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. 20 Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD.” 21 A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel's sons because they have perverted their way; they have forgotten the LORD their God. 22 “Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness.” “Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God. 23 Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. 24 “But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our fathers labored, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. 25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”

3:6–6:30 The unfaithfulness of Judah (3:6–5:31) will ultimately bring the Babylonians as God’s instrument of judgment (ch. 6). (CSB)

3:6–25 Though the unfaithful Israelites deserve to suffer the dire consequences of their heinous crimes, it is not too late to avert impending doom. God, who is rich in love and faithfulness, will forgive all their adulteries if only they return to Him. Yet the history of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, should teach Judah, the southern sister, that the call to repentance cannot be ignored with impunity. (TLSB)

3:6 *King Josiah*. Reigned in Judah 640–609 BC. The next king Jeremiah mentions is Zedekiah (21:1), the last of the kings of Judah (597–587 BC). (TLSB)

The renewed devotion to the true worship of the Lord fostered by King Josiah did not take root in the hearts of his people. (PBC)

faithless, onne Israel. The northern kingdom, destroyed in 722–721 B.C. (see vv. 8, 11–12). (CSB)

Israel being called apostasy outright to emphasize the seriousness of her defection. (Kretzmann)

on every high hill and under every green tree ... played the whore. In committing idolatry or spiritual adultery, the sanctuaries of idols being located in such places. (Kretzmann)

3:7 *her treacherous sister Judah*. The southern kingdom (see vv. 8, 10–11). Samaria (Israel’s capital) and Jerusalem (Judah’s capital) are similarly compared as adulterous sisters in Eze 23. (CSB)

Cf Ezk 16. After Solomon's death, the 10 northern tribes, called Israel, seceded from the Davidic kingdom. The two remaining tribes constituted Judah. The term Israel, however, continues to be used as a general designation for the covenant nation (e.g., vv 20–21). (TLSB)

it. Israel's adultery. (CSB)

3:8 *decree of divorce.* A writing of dismissal, namely, at the time when the northern kingdom was led away into the Assyrian captivity. (Kretzmann)

sent her away. Into exile in 721 B.C. (CSB)

Judah did not fear. She refused to learn from Israel's tragic experience. (CSB)

The chilling lesson of Israel had no impact on the people of Judah. Without fear and with even greater determination, Judah kept on committing the same sins as her sister to the north. She kept plunging along the same path to destruction. (PBC)

3:9 *took whoredom lightly* – The ease with which she practiced her infamous wickedness. (Kretzmann)

committed adultery with stone and tree. Worshiped pagan deities (see 2:27). (CSB)

With idols of wood and stone, so that the entire land was profaned before the Lord, the entire section inhabited by the northern tribes being polluted by the idolatrous customs so readily accepted by its people. (Kretzmann)

3:10 *in pretense.* Judah's response to Josiah's reform measures was superficial and hypocritical. (CSB)

3:11 *Israel is more righteous than ... Judah.* She (Israel) was righteous by comparison with the overwhelming guilt of the latter, who possessed the unusual advantages of the Temple and the center of worship in her midst. (Kretzmann)

3:12-18 Ultimately, Jeremiah's preaching of repentance was in vain. The disaster he predicted overtook the apostate nation when the Babylonians invaded from the north, destroying the land and taking captive its inhabitants. But even then, the way to return to the Lord would remain open. God's forgiveness would wipe the record clean. Through a surviving remnant brought back to Zion, He would usher in a time when not only the descendants of Abraham but "all nations" could become full-fledged citizens in the messianic kingdom. In this worldwide spiritual community (called the Church in the NT), the Lord has His throne, symbolized here by His presence over the ark of the covenant and in the temple at Jerusalem. (TLSB)

3:12 *north.* Assyria's northern provinces, to which many Israelites had been exiled. (CSB)

Return. Repent (see v. 13). (CSB)

"Our churches teach that there is forgiveness of sins for those who have fallen after Baptism whenever they are converted. The Church ought to impart Absolution to those who return to repentance" (AC XII 1–2). (TLSB)

With great affection and tenderness He begs the sinner, here portrayed by Israel, to return to Him. He invites the sinner to confess his sins from the heart. (PBC)

merciful. The Hebrew for this word is used of God elsewhere only in Ps 145:13, 17, where it is translated “loving.” (CSB)

3:14 *master.* From Hbr verb *ba‘al*, like the name of the Canaanite god they worshiped (Baal). (TLSB)

Zion. Jerusalem. (CSB)

3:15 *shepherds.* Leaders in both the spiritual and the civil domain, as Zerubbabel and Nehemiah. (Kretzmann)

after my own heart. Like David (see 1Sa 13:14; see also Eze 34:23; Hos 3:5). (CSB)

To replace the faithless, false leaders who had deceived His people, the Lord would send leaders after His own mind. They would guide His people with a knowledge born of intimate acquaintance with God’s Word. (PBC)

3:16 *In those days.*† The Messianic age of the new covenant (see v. 18; 31:29). (CSB)

numbers have increased. See 23:3; Eze 36:11. For the fuller meaning of the Hebrew underlying this phrase see note on Ge 1:28 – (Man goes forth under this divine benediction—flourishing, filling the earth with his kind, and exercising dominion over the other earthly creatures (see v. 26; 2:15; Ps 8:6–8). Human culture, accordingly, is not anti-God (though fallen man often has turned his efforts into proud rebellion against God). As God’s representative in the creaturely realm, he is steward of God’s creatures. He is not to exploit, waste or despoil them, but to care for them and use them in the service of God and man.) (CSB)

shall not be made again.† The ark of the covenant, formerly symbolizing God’s royal presence, will no longer serve that purpose when the Messiah comes. (CSB)

Ark was, in fact, not restored after the Babylonian captivity, the Lord thus signifying that the time of types and shadows was soon to come to an end. (Kretzmann)

3:17 *Throne.*† The Lord had been “enthroned between the cherubim” above the ark, but Jerusalem, symbolizing the spiritual capital of Christ’s kingdom, would someday be his throne. (CSB)

all nations shall gather. Converted from their sinful ways, they will follow the Lord. (TLSB)

From all the countries of the dispersion. (Kretzmann)

they. Israel. (CSB)

follow their own evil hearts. A stock phrase referring to Israel’s disobedience and often involving the worship of pagan gods (see 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17). (CSB)

3:18 *Judah shall join ... Israel.*† In the Messianic kingdom there will be no national or racial divisions (see Gal 3:26–29). (CSB)

land of the north. Where they had been exiles. (CSB)

3:19 *sons.* Israel was the Lord’s firstborn (see Ex 4:22; cf. Hos 11:1). (CSB)

Nations besides Israel. (TLSB)

pleasant land. The Hebrew for this phrase is translated “pleasant land” in Ps 106:24; Zec 7:14. (CSB)

3:20 A concise summary of the story told in Hos 1–3. (CSB)

Though the Lord has great plans for Israel, He emphasizes that the people of Jeremiah’s time continue to be disobedient and unfaithful. (TLSB)

3:21 *bare heights.* Where they prostituted themselves. (TLSB)

weeping and pleading. A description of repentance, verbalized in vv. 22b–25. (CSB)

forgotten. A fact which they now acknowledge with deep sorrow. (Kretzmann)

3:22 *Return, faithless.* Each of these three words is derived from the same Hebrew root, producing a striking series of puns. (CSB)

I will heal your faithlessness. Taking their cue from the Lord’s invitation, they would have thrown themselves wholly on His mercy. (PBC)

3:23 *orgies on the mountains.* It is a delusion and a snare to expect help from the priests of the mountain sanctuaries. (Kretzmann)

truly in the Lord our God. Believers give God no greater honor than believing His promise and looking to Him as their savior. This is the kind of honor He had hoped Judah would give Him. (PBC)

3:24 *our youth.* The period of the judges. (CSB)

shameful thing. Synonym for Baal. (TLSB)

devoured all. False worship is costly, both financially and spiritually. (CSB)

sons and daughters. Often sacrificed to pagan gods. (CSB)

Not only did their service require a steady stream of sacrifices, but their worship also brought down upon the people the punishment of the Lord, by which their children were torn from their side. (Kretzmann)

3:25 *let us lie down* – Act of mourning and repentance. (TLSB)

As the penitent seats himself in dust and in ashes. (Kretzmann)

shame. The Hebrew for this word is translated “shameful gods” in v. 24. (CSB)

not obeyed the voice of the Lord – A full and unequivocal confession of sins, a complete acknowledgment of guilt, is the first step in true repentance. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Prov. 28,13. (Kretzmann)