

# Jeremiah 3 • Return, O Faithless sons

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Chapter 3, Jeremiah chapter 3, once again, Jeremiah is going to use...pictures, word pictures to help illustrate the immoral condition that had taken hold of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and he's going to begin with a picture of an unfaithful wife, which is one that he brings up. Actually, the Lord brings up quite often as it relates to helping us to see what this looks like, and he begins in verse 1 by saying *“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?”* Asking a rhetorical question.

And then he says, *“You have played the whore with many lovers; and would you return to me? declares the Lord.”* This is strong language, difficult language to read, frankly, but He's asking a question of the people of Judah. And that question is essentially, if a man divorces his wife, she goes on to marry somebody else, would he then take her back as his wife?

Well, the fact of the matter is, reading this from the perspective of modern America, we'd say yeah. Yeah, he would, because it happens. But it was known to be a greatly immoral thing. First of all, it was forbidden in the Law of Moses. And this first verse points back to a prohibition that was laid out in the Book of Deuteronomy when Moses was reiterating the law, let me show it to you on the screen from Deuteronomy chapter 24. The first four verses say,

## **Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (ESV)**

*“When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.”*

So, we can see here from this passage in Deuteronomy. That this was something that the Jews knew and understood that was forbidden from the Lord. And I

believe that they knew it instinctively as well. He...because as the Lord talks about this here in Jeremiah, it seems that He's referring to it as if to say, this is universally known. You just don't do this. This would pollute the land. And of course, that's a spiritual pollution.

Now, why is He saying it? Because He's basically making the point that what they wouldn't dream of doing, in a physical marital sense, the Lord is saying, you're actually doing that or at least, this is what we're faced with, in our relationship. The Nation of Judah or the Kingdom of Judah, and the Lord.

And so, He asks the question, would you then return to Me? Look at...He says in verse 2, *"<sup>2</sup> 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..."* Now He's not talking about, He's not talking about physical sex here necessarily at all.

He's making references to it by statements like, or words like, ravished and waiting for lovers. But He's referring to spiritual adultery. He's talking about the worship of pagan deities, which sometimes did involve sexual contact, but not always. But the point is, He says *"...you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness..."*

And He's referring to the Arab bandits, that actually used to wait along the roadside in hiding for caravans to come by so they could jump out and pounce on them and gain treasures from them. And he says you're sitting and waiting in...lying in wait for the next opportunity to sin just like a bandit would lie in wait to jump out and become...and jump upon a.... you know, an unsuspecting group of people.

He goes on there at the end of verse 2 to say, *"...you have polluted the land with your vile whoredom."* And this is strong language, very strong language. The Lord likens spiritual unfaithfulness to prostitution. And that's just the wording that He uses. And we're kind of repulsed by this a little bit.

I mean, I don't like the word whoredom. I don't like to read it. I don't like to say it out loud. Some of the other Bibles use harlotry. I don't know, it just sounds a little better. You know, I kind of wish the ESV translators might have used harlotry instead of whoredom. But then I stopped to think, why is it that I feel that way?

Well, it just, we're repulsed by certain words, certain images, certain ideas. But Christians, that's the point. That's the point of God using strong language here

because He wants them to understand the gravity of what they're doing. And so, He's using strong language to shock. Whoredom, really? Prostitution?

This is the way You see this sin. Yes, indeed. This is the way God sees this. And see, this is important for us to understand because we have this tendency, as Christians, to gloss over certain sins or to kind of think it's really not that bad or to explain it away or to make excuses or what have you. And then and...or we just live in a world where sin is so rampant anyway that we're jaded. We become jaded.

You know that the world you live in is very jaded to the point where you talk about same-sex relationships. People in the world are like, yeah, of course, normal. It's normal. You and I, we look at things like that and we're kind of like (makes 'ahh' noise). We know what the Word of God has to say, and we react to it, not to the individuals themselves.

We're to love them in Christ and witness to them and bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus, but the sin itself is repulsive. I'll just say it. It's repulsive. Because all sin is repulsive. That's the point. All sin is...but we forget that because we live in a world that is literally just wallowing in sin.

And we walk through it every single day. We walk through it. You guys who work out in the world, you know, you have things going on in your life that I often don't. As a pastor and teacher, I don't sit and rub shoulders with people in the world every single day like you do in the workplace and hear vile language and vile conversation and hear people talking about things as if they are just completely normal, even glorifying those things, in your presence.

And your heart is grieved by it I know, and you got to be careful that you don't become jaded by the language to the point where we start to think that this isn't that big of a deal. You know, hey, everybody's doing it sort of a thing, you know, it's not that big of a deal. It's a big deal.

And that's why God is using shocking language here to describe the spiritual adultery of His people. And it's important that we see that. So, if you're offended, you were meant to be. Okay? God meant to offend you. We live in this world where we try never to offend anybody. God goes around offending everybody and that's just kind of the way it is.

Verse 3, notice after telling them what their lives have been involved in, He says, “<sup>3</sup> *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.*” Look at there, that's that attitude. “...*you refuse to be ashamed.*”

*“<sup>4</sup> Have you not just now called to me, ‘My father, you are the friend of my youth—<sup>5</sup> 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.”* It's interesting here because the Lord begins this section by saying, I withheld the rains from your crops.

You can't grow food because I've been withholding the rain, which, by the way, He told them He would do through Moses in the law if they got off course and started to reject Him as their God (referring to **Deuteronomy 11:16-17 ESV**). And yet, these people are talking to God as if they have a close relationship with Him. My Father, You are the friend of my youth.

And He says, you say that it comes out of your mouth, and at the same time, you just carry on with your evil. You know, it's kind of ironic about this whole thing about God withholding the rain. He's withholding it, why? Because they're worshiping pagan deities. What are those pagan deities all about? Oh, rain, fertility, growth, all the things that God provides, yet they're turning to these pagan deities.

And in response to that, God says, you're praying to these pagan deities because you think you're going to get a benefit from it. And I'm going to actually withhold the rain because of your unfaithfulness. So, God is showing that He is the one who controls the elements of the earth and not the pagan deities.

*“<sup>6</sup> The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah...”* Can you stop there for just a moment? Do you guys remember King Josiah? Great king. Great king. Godly man. Loved the Lord. Took the throne as a very young boy. Sought the Lord when the nation of Judah was in the throes of idolatry and paganism. Sought the Lord his God (referring to **2 Kings 22-23 ESV**).

It looks...when you read through the studies of the kings and Josiah comes to the throne, it's kind of like you want to go, yeah! You want to just cheer for the guy because, you know, you got this good king in there. But I want you to see what the Lord says to, through Jeremiah, because Jeremiah lived during the days of King Josiah.

What does He say about the Southern Kingdom of Judah during that time? Look what He says, *“<sup>6</sup> 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?”* Now, He's telling Jeremiah to think about or to take note of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

I'll remind you again, for those of you that may forget. Israel had a split, a civil war, and they split into a Northern Kingdom and a Southern Kingdom (referring to **1 Kings 12 ESV**). The Northern Kingdom retained the name of Israel. The Southern Kingdom took the name of Judah after the largest of the tribes that encompass that area.

The Southern Kingdom had the capital city of Jerusalem. So, Judah had the capital city of Jerusalem, the Northern Kingdom adopted the city of Samaria as its capital city. So, you've got these two kingdoms. Now, Jeremiah is a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah. And the Lord says to him, have you seen what unfaithful Israel, Northern Kingdom, did? She went up and played the whore, all right?

He goes on. Verse 7. *“<sup>7</sup> 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.”* In other words, the Southern Kingdom of Judah watched as Israel preceded them in paganism and all of the evil that they did.

Now He's saying, talk about Judah. Verse 8, *“<sup>8</sup> She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce...”* And that refers to the Assyrian Army coming in, I believe it was 722 B.C., and conquering the Northern Kingdom of Israel and carting the people out of there (referring to **2 Kings 17 ESV**) and so God says, I gave them a decree of divorce.

All right. And He says, *“<sup>8</sup>...Yet her treacherous sister Judah (Southern Kingdom) did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. <sup>9</sup> Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. (Speaking of some of the things they would use to create idols.) <sup>10</sup> Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, (Look at this.) but in pretense, declares the Lord.”*

Those last words are very key. Remember, this was a time of revival, but only in pretense. You know, we...sometimes we think if we can just get a godly leader to lead us, that's what, you know, we just need a godly leader.

Well, you know, Judah got a very godly leader in King Josiah, but the people didn't follow suit. They went along with it as a pretense, but it never became truly part of their own heart. And that's what the Lord is confronting now in the

Southern Kingdom of Judah. It was not...their return to the Lord was not done wholeheartedly.

So, we go on in verse 11 and it says, *“<sup>11</sup> And the Lord said to me, ‘Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.’* Now this is an absolutely shocking statement because you remember Israel, if you look at the kings of Israel alongside the kings of Judah, how many good kings were there in Israel? Zero. None. They were all bad.

Now, the Southern Kingdom of Judah had a lot of bad kings, but they had a lot of good kings. A lot of really good kings. And yet, even for that, the Lord says here that *“Faithless Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.”* And we're kind of like, why in the world would the Lord say such a thing?

I mean, how had the Northern Kingdom shown itself to be more righteous than the Southern Kingdom of Judah? Well, remember the Lord had already accused the Southern Kingdom of returning to Him only in pretense, so in other words they faked it. The Northern Kingdom never even faked it, they just lived their sinful life.

But there's something about the way the Lord views a half-hearted approach to come to Him, that double-mindedness, that lukewarm sort of a concept of approaching Him, and so forth. But furthermore, I think...and the other thing that He's already mentioned here is that Judah had the benefit of seeing everything that happened as it unfolded in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and they didn't respond.

In other words, God gave Judah the opportunity to look, to notice, to take note of how it was playing out, see the Lord's judgment, and then to say, wait a minute, that's what's going to happen to us too if we stay on the same road that we're on right now.

But they didn't learn anything from it. In other words, God put them through school, and they rejected the lesson. They failed to heed the warnings. Now, as we go on and read verse 12, I want you to take note of this because this is kind of amazing. Because here the Lord is going to address the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which had already been conquered by the Assyrian Army.

They'd been scattered into various nations. But He says to them, *“<sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. ’’*

Now I want you to stop there for just a moment. The reason I'm highlighting verses 12 and 13 for you is because, remember, northern Israel has already been conquered. It's like gone. And what the Assyrians would do to limit and to weaken their enemies is, they would conquer a nation like Israel, and they would take some of the people and deport them to this country, other country that they had also conquered, and some of the people and deport them to that country that they'd also conquered, and take some of the other people and deport them to a different country that they'd also conquered.

You with me? They'd separate them. And that created a weakness so that those people would not be able to mount a rebellion. So, they're scattered. And they, the Assyrians, also brought other foreigners to live in Israel, okay? They left some of the Jews in the land, just a few. But they brought other foreigners into the land and those people began to intermarry. That's where you get the Samaritans that we see in the New Testament.

But it was a mess. It was just a big mess. And they're like, your kind of thinking, oh, they're gone. Those people, Northern Kingdom, yeah, I'll talk about something else that kind of leads into this in a moment. But I want you to see here that even now, the Lord calls to those people.

He calls to Jeremiah to prophesy to those people. He says, if they will repent, and if they will acknowledge their guilt, I will still bring them home. I'll still bring them back, even though they don't even have a nation to come to. Oh, there's Judah is still here, at least for now, but even so, I will bring them back.

This is crazy. He goes on to make promises. Look at verse 14 with me. This is really something. *“<sup>14</sup> 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. ”*

So, you see, even if the nation as a whole refuses to repent, God says to individuals, if you repent, if you acknowledge your sin, I'll bring you back. Your leaders, maybe not, but you...you repent, I'll bring you back. And, you know, this is what the Lord promised once again through Moses. Even if I scatter you to the four winds, if you acknowledge your sin, if you cry out to me

with all your heart I'll bring you back, (correcting himself) bring you back because I am a God of mercy. (Referring to **Deuteronomy 30 ESV**)

People say, oh, I don't like reading the Old Testament. There's no mercy. I don't see God's mercy in the Old Testament. It's just judgment. Okay, you saw it right here. Okay. Make note of it. Put a little note in your Bible. Just write mercy next to those verses because that's mercy, says He's still going to regather them.

And so, He goes on to speak more of promises made here, but I want you to notice as we continue reading here in verse 15. This is...He's going to begin to speak prophetically about the promises, the blessings, that are going to come to the Nation of Israel in the renewed kingdom during what we call the Messianic Kingdom or the Millennial Kingdom, goes by both names, so note that here in verse 15. He switches to prophetic.

Verse 15. *"<sup>15</sup> 'And I will give you shepherds after my own heart...' "* Do you know what that refers to? That's David. Do you guys know that in the Millennial Kingdom, David is going to rule in Jerusalem? King David. He's coming back, guys. And He's going to rule right there in Jerusalem. He says, because, you know, he called David a man after his own heart (referring to **1 Samuel 13:14 ESV**).

He says now, *"<sup>15</sup> 'And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. <sup>16</sup> 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. "*

You know, the Ark of the Covenant, we believe, was lost when the Babylonians came, conquered Southern Kingdom of Judah, decimated the city, raised the temple, burned it to the ground, and the Ark was never seen again. And the Lord says here, it's not going to be made again. You know why?

Because now He's prophesying about the renewed kingdom, where the Lord's own presence is going to be in their midst. They don't need a box covered with gold, because the Lord's own presence will be there. He says it won't even be missed.

Verse 17, *"<sup>17</sup> At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord, (See, this is during the Millennial Kingdom.) and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem..."* And this is a promise that's repeated by



many of the Old Testament prophets. Speaking of the fact that the nations of the world will be gathered to the Lord in Jerusalem during the Millennial Kingdom.

They will come to pay homage and so forth. And it tells us here, *“<sup>17</sup>...and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. (Verse 18) <sup>18</sup> 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.”*

Now, I want you to stop there because verse 18 is very important. It's very important that you see what it says here. Did you notice in verse 18, that God prophesied that in the Millennial Kingdom that He was going to join the house of Israel and the house of Judah? Did you catch that? In other words, the civil war and split that took place under King David's grandson, Rehoboam, will be completely healed when Jesus is on the throne and David is ruling over Jerusalem.

The kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be united. Now, why is that important? It's important because... Well, I don't know if you've ever read anything, or seen a video on YouTube, or something, or read a book about the Lost Tribes of Israel. Anyone ever seen that? The Lost 10 Tribes. This...it got popularized and even cults have risen out of this idea of the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel.

Some people say they migrated to what was, what is now Britain. And the Britons are actually the Jews of the Lost Tribes of Israel. And of course, we have the ability today with DNA to show that's a bunch of bunk. But the point here is that it...this really grew and gained a lot of footing.

People believe, and they say, well, there's 2 tribes, (correction) 10 tribes of Israel that are lost. They're gone. Why do we believe that? Well, we know from the scripture that Israel was conquered by the Assyrians. I already told you that. And what happened was they then they just scattered the people and they never...God never brought them back.

God never brought the Northern Kingdom of Israel back. And there were 10 tribes that made up the Northern Kingdom. Two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, that made up the Southern Kingdom. They also got conquered, but they got brought back, remember? So, the 2 southern tribes, Judah and Benjamin, when the Babylonians came, they conquered that territory, hauled them off to the Babylonian Empire (/) slash Persian Empire.

But after 70 years, according to the prophecy of Jeremiah (referring to **Jeremiah 29:10-14 ESV**) which we'll get to, God brought them back,

remember (referring to **Ezra 1-3 ESV**)? Cyrus got raised up. He was a Persian King and he said, all the Jews can go home. I want you to go home and rebuild your temple. So, we think to ourselves, wow, the Jews of the Southern Kingdom got returned to their nation and they lived there until the time of Jesus, through that time. And then it wasn't until the Roman conquering of Israel at that time, or you remember, of course, the Greek name is Judea, which we read about in the New Testament.

So, people just think, well, see, those northern 10 tribes, they just...they're gone. They just evaporated into thin air. Gone, see you. There's only one problem with that. God prophesies here, He says He's going to join the House of Israel and the House of Judah. So, you see, this whole thing about the Lost 10 Tribes of Israel is based on inference and assumption. Because what people don't realize is that God always has a remnant. Always, He is never without a remnant.

He says that over and over in His Word. And when Israel, which preceded Judah in idolatry, began to walk in that evil, idolatrous activity, there were many people from those 10 tribes in the Northern Kingdom who were fed up and they just said, forget this. And what did they do?

They moved to the Southern Kingdom. So, by the time the Babylonians conquered the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which was predominantly made up of the territories of Judah and Benjamin, there were people from all 12 tribes living in that southern land. In other words, all 12 tribes got taken off to the Babylonian Empire, and all of them were able to come back.

There are no lost tribes. God doesn't lose things like you and I. We lose our keys, we lose our remotes, we lose our phone once in a while, but God doesn't lose things. He knows where He keeps things, and He's able to call them back. And so, if you ever read any nonsense about the Lost Tribes of Israel just tell people, whoever's telling you that, that's a bunch of hooey.

And that God prophesies otherwise and says He's going to bring them all back. And there are other prophecies of the end times that make reference to the tribes of the Northern Kingdom and how they will be there. All right. Here and now the Lord begins to, or continues rather, to denounce Israel's fall into rebellion verse 19 He says, *"<sup>19</sup> '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.*

*<sup>20</sup> Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.' (Verse 21) <sup>21</sup> 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."*

Now this is interesting, this is that remnant I was talking about. Do you know whenever a nation collapses into immorality, there's always people who grieve? There's people who cry, they literally cry, and we got to learn to take our cries to the Lord. Otherwise, they'll consume us, but it was happening then too.

Here in verse 21. He says a voice is heard. Jeremiah prophesies this because God hears that voice. It's the voice of weeping. It's the voice of pleading. Notice it says in verse 21. It's the pleading of who? Israel's sons.

Verse 22, this begins with a word from the Lord. *"<sup>22</sup> Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness. (And then the faithful remnant responds by saying,) "Behold, we come to you, for you are the Lord our God. <sup>23</sup> Truly the hills are a delusion, (The hills are where they worship pagan idols. They would get up on the hills. Pagans believe that the higher you get geographically, the closer you are to your God. So, the hills are a delusion.) the orgies on the mountains, (so you can see that there were sexual things that went along with the worship of some pagan deities.) Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.*

*"<sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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."*

I don't know how you feel about this sort of confession coming from someone who is faithful to the Lord. But, do you know, this is the voice of the faithful remnant? This is the cry of Nehemiah. This is the cry of Daniel, who interceded for their own nation. But they cried like they were the ones...you know, these godly men of the Old Testament, they never prayed about their country saying, well, I didn't do this, but they did, and man, are they rotten. Rotten to the core. So, God, have mercy on us, or on them, anyway. None of that.

Have you read through the prayers of, like, Daniel? Have you read through Nehemiah's prayer? Ezra? They cried like they were personally at fault. They came to the Lord and said, we did this. We did this, and we deserve judgment, but we call upon your name to pour out your mercy. They're powerful prayers. The prayers of the godly remnant.

And I think that's a good insight for us on this day when we're seeing our nation embroiled in such difficulty, such division, such evil, such hatred. Not for us to pray and go, yeah, those people. Say, look what we've done. Lord, look what we've done. Forgive us.