

Journey through Jeremiah Part 4 – Backsliding Israel

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, January 11, 2017

† Jeremiah 3:1-25

(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.

In the Hebrew laws concerning divorce, when a man divorced a woman, then she remarried and divorced a second time, she could not go back to the first husband under any circumstances. We read that in:

Deuteronomy 24:4: 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.

Although that was indeed the law between husbands and wives, the LORD had taken Judah back numerous times even though she had been unfaithful to Him. Judah's lovers were Egypt and Assyria as was mentioned in the previous chapter.

(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 Arabians were known to lie in wait in the desert for travelers and then rob them. The LORD is comparing the idolatry of the Jews with them.

(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.

Israel had two rainy seasons, an "early" rain and a "latter" rain. Both were needed for the crops to be fully grown at harvest time. As punishment for their idolatry the LORD has withheld the latter rain from them.

Deuteronomy 11:13-17: And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the LORD your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul,

14 That I will give *you* the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.

15 And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full.

16 Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them;

17 And *then* the LORD'S wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and *lest* ye perish quickly from off the good land which the LORD giveth you.

So, there was no excuse, the signs were all there yet they refused to turn from their sin. Just as the LORD promised, He withheld the rain.

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

Even in Judah's sinful condition they still claim the LORD as their Father and go through the pretenses as if they worship Him and Him only. But He knows them and their wickedness and will not give them another chance.

(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.

We know that Jeremiah was called to be a prophet in the 13th year of the reign of King Josiah. In the 18th year of Josiah's reign was when the "book" was found and Josiah began a holy rampage of ridding the Kingdom of idolatry, but obviously, the people were very steeped in it and while he did a cleaning of the places of idol worship and declared a law that they were to only worship the LORD, the people were still prone to idol worship.

Here he is talking about the Northern Kingdom of Israel and how they worshiped false gods. He says "*she is gone up upon every high mountain,*" this is most likely referring to the worship of the gods that were worshiped by the pagans all around them, such as Molech the fire god and Ashtoreth, the Phoenician goddess of fertility. In this worship, they would build altars on top of hills (thus the "*high places*") and there was a lot of sexual immorality involved.

One of King Solomon's biggest downfalls was practicing this type of worship that he picked up from his pagan wives. We read about it in:

1 Kings 11:4-7:

(4) For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, *that* his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as *was* the heart of David his father.

(5) For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.

(6) And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father.

(7) Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that *is* before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.

Again he uses the expression, "*hath played the harlot,*" just as he did in the previous chapter. He is speaking of spiritual adultery.

(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*. (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.

He describes how he tried to get Israel to repent and return to Him but they refused. Then he calls the Southern Kingdom of Judah, "*her sister.*" Even though Judah (her sister) saw what happened to Israel they followed in her footsteps and did the same thing and "*played the harlot also.*"

(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.

As we said in the previous chapter when the “stone and stocks” were mentioned, this is probably referring to the idols that they made to use in the worship of these false gods. The worship of Ashteroth involved a nasty type of worship where they would set up wooden poles called “**Ashera poles**” in the ground that were carved into phallic symbols.

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

That word “feignedly,” means “**untruthfully or deceitfully.**” Judah only pretended to turn to the LORD.

(11) And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

Jeremiah says that the LORD told him that “backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.” Wow, talk about a slap in the face. That Israel, as bad as they were, wasn’t as evil as Judah was! The sins of Judah even outweighed those of Israel and even the heathen nations around them.

(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.

(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.

The LORD tells Jeremiah to proclaim to the north (Israel who is already in captivity by the Assyrians) to return from their backsliding and his anger will cease. He assures them that He is merciful.

Notice that there is a requirement for them. They must not only turn from their sin but they also must acknowledge it and admit that they have been unfaithful to the LORD.

Some of God’s promises are without conditions but many do have conditions and they are always conditional depending upon whether or not we do what God says. For example: one of God’s unconditional promises is found in: **Genesis 8:21: And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.** Nothing was required of man for God to keep that promise.

But in the case of Israel it is conditional. They must return to the LORD, and acknowledge their iniquity, or he will not have mercy upon them.

(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: “for I am married unto you” Then, even though he said in **verse 8** because of their spiritual adultery He “had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce,” he is willing to take her back into the marriage.

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

Remember in the previous chapter we studied he said “the pastors also transgressed against me.” Well, here he tells them that if they will return to him and acknowledge their sins that he will take them back and even give them good pastors, that are according to His heart and they will “feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

(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 of the covenant was the symbol of God dwelling among His people. It was a figure of Christ. Here the LORD is saying if the people will turn from their wickedness, return to Him, and acknowledge their sin then he will dwell among them and there will be no need for the ark because He Himself will be among them in the presence of the Messiah.

There would be no more visiting the ark or thinking of the ark when they want to be in the presence of God. But, we know they refused to obey. It is believed that the ark was later destroyed when the Temple was destroyed because it is not listed among the items of things carried away by the Chaldeans when they ransacked it.

Of course, there are many believe that the ark is somewhere still missing, that it is hidden away waiting to be discovered. That is what the movie Indiana Jones is based upon, Dr. Jones exploring and discovering the ark of the covenant.

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.

(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.

Here it is still speaking of how they would live if they would obey Him. All the nations of Israel and Judah would come back together and live together in unity with Jerusalem being the centerpiece of the land.

All through the scripture you will find the emphasis of Jerusalem being the place where the LORD will bless His people. He has marked it as a Holy place.

You need to pay attention to the things that are going on in Israel right now. Tuesday of last week Senate Republicans; dean Heller, Marco Rubio, and Ted Cruz co-sponsored a Bill called the “*Jerusalem Embassy and Recognition Act.*”[‡] It is to recognize Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel and move the United States embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

This has caused quite a stir not only in the Senate but in the world. Our new President elect Trump is fully behind the bill and has every intention of seeing it go through.

Senator Marco Rubio made the following statement before Congress: “*It’s time for Congress and the President-elect to eliminate the loophole that has allowed presidents in both parties to ignore US law and delay our embassy’s rightful relocation to Jerusalem for over two decades.*”[§]

Senator Ted Cruz said: “*Unfortunately, the Obama administration’s vendetta against the Jewish state has been so vicious that to even utter this simple truth – let alone the reality that Jerusalem is the appropriate venue for the American embassy in Israel – is shocking in some circles.*”[§]

You can only imagine that the Palestinians are upset because they believe that Jerusalem is to be their future capital. But, we know from reading our Bibles that Jerusalem is the capital city of Israel.

(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.

Then he asks a question: “How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of hosts of nations?” In other words, how could I rightfully do this considering how you have sinned against me?

Then he answers the question: “Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.” So, again, another promise with a condition. For them to enjoy the things that He has in store for them they must turn back to Him and treat Him as their Father.

(20) Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD.

(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.

(22) Return, ye backsliding children, *and* I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou *art* the LORD our God.

Then he reminds them again of how they have sinned against Him and turned from Him and to their false gods and idols. He compares them again to an adulteress wife.

He mentions their ungodly worship in high places again but that they are weeping because of their perversions. But, as mentioned in verse 22, He is willing to hear them and heal them on the condition that they turn back to Him. Just as is written in:

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. That is the same message for the United States of America today.

(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.

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

(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.

These last 3 verses are what is expected of the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah if they are to be blessed. They must repent and recognize that their vain worship strange gods and idols in the hills and mountains is useless. Their only hope is in the LORD and they must turn to Him.

[†] All Scripture from the Authorized King James Bible

[‡] <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/11/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22jerusalem%22%5D%7D&r=1>

[§] CNN <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/04/politics/jerusalem-embassy-senate-bill-rubio-cruz/index.html>