

Session 10 The Forerunner Message in Jeremiah 3

I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

- A. Note: Five dates are important to know for better understanding of the message of the prophets.
- 933 BC civil war—the 10 tribes of Israel (north) fought against Judah (south).
 - 721 BC Israel (north) was destroyed by Assyria (about 200 years after the civil war started).
 - 586 BC Judah (south)—Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar).
 - 536 BC The Jews returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem and temple.
 - AD 70 Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans (1948 re-established the state of Israel).
- B. Jeremiah served under the last 5 kings of Judah: Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah.
1. ***Josiah ruled 31 years*** (640-609; from age 8-39). His great-grandfather, Hezekiah, (a good king) reigned 29 years; his grandfather, Manasseh, (an evil king) reigned 55 years.
 2. Jehoahaz (Shallum) [Josiah's 3rd son] reigned for 3 months (609) then was taken to Egypt.
 3. ***Jehoiakim*** (Eliakim) [Josiah's 2nd son] reigned for about ***10 years*** (609-598).
 4. Jehoiachin (Coniah) [Josiah's grandson via Jehoiakim] reigned 3 months (597)
 5. ***Zedekiah*** (Mattaniah) [Josiah's 4th son] reigned about ***10 years*** (597-586) until Jerusalem fell.
- C. Isaiah began his ministry around 740 BC, ministering nearly 50 years. Jeremiah began his ministry around 626 BC, about 100 years after Isaiah. Josiah's reform began when he tore down idols at the age of 20 (628 BC; 2 Chr. 34:3-7). About six years later, when he was 26 years old, Josiah began to repair the temple and restore its order of worship; he discovered the book of the Law and renewed the covenant between his people and the Lord (622 BC 2 Chr. 34:8-20; cf. 2 Kgs. 22:3-13).
- D. Jeremiah 2-3 go together, using similar language and emphasizing the same themes and theology. The Lord charged Judah with spiritual "harlotry" (Jer. 2), called them to return, and then promised great blessing to those who responded (Jer. 3). Jeremiah 2-3 may have been spoken to help Josiah's reform that began in 628 BC (3:4, 6, 10) to correct the idolatry promoted by Manasseh.
- ¹Manasseh...he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. ²But he did evil in the sight of the LORD...
³For he rebuilt the high places [for idolatry] which Hezekiah his father had broken down...
⁶He caused his sons to pass through the fire...he practiced...witchcraft and sorcery...⁷He even set...the idol...in the house of God...⁹Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel.
(2 Chr. 33:1-9)***
- E. Outline for Jeremiah 3 (some include 4:1-4 in the message given in Jeremiah 3)
- 3:1-5 Judah's great sin of spiritual harlotry
 - 3:6-10 Judah's sin is greater than Israel's
 - 3:11-18 Israel will return to God and His favor
 - 3:19-20 The Lord's desire to give Israel a beautiful heritage
 - 3:21-25 Israel's national repentance in the end times
 - 4:1-4 The Lord's response to Israel's repentance

II. THE BETROTHAL OF ISRAEL TO GOD IN THE WILDERNESS (EX. 19; JER. 2:2)

- A. Jeremiah understood that the covenant that God made at Mount Sinai betrothed Israel to Him (Jer. 2:2; 31:32). Moses described the time when God made His covenant with Israel (Ex. 19).
²Cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, "...I remember you, the kindness [devotion; NAS, NIV] of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness." (Jer. 2:2)
³²"...the covenant that I made...I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them," says the LORD. (Jer. 31:32)
- B. Jeremiah began his ministry by calling people to repent in light of who they are to God (Jer. 2-3).
¹⁴"Return, O backsliding children," says the LORD, "for I am married to you." (Jer. 3:14)
¹⁷And the Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!" (Rev. 22:17)

III. JUDAH'S GREAT SIN OF SPIRITUAL HARLOTRY (JER. 3:1-5)

- A. Judah is described as an adulterous wife whom the Lord wanted to restore back to Him (3:1-5). Possibly this message was given soon after Josiah's attempt to reform Judah (starting in 628 BC). Idol worship included sexual immorality along with sacrifices and rituals (Rev. 2:14, 20).
¹"...If a man divorces his wife, and she...becomes another man's, may he return to her again? ...but you [Judah] have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me," says the LORD.
²"Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: where have you not lain with men? ... you have polluted the land with your harlotries...³Therefore the showers [early rains] have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; you refuse to be ashamed. ⁴Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth?' ⁵Will He remain angry forever?' ...Behold, you have spoken and done evil things..." (Jer. 3:1-5)
- B. **Divorces his wife:** Moses' law prohibited a man who divorced his wife to remarry her if she had married another man (Deut. 24:1-4). The Lord compared Judah to a harlot with many lovers. Would such a woman normally expect to be reconciled to her husband? Despite that law, He invited Israel to return to Him as His Bride. The analogy suggests that it would be unusual, not the norm.
- C. **Return to Me:** The Lord shows His extravagant grace in calling her to return (3:2, 7, 12, 14, 22).
- D. **Lift up your eyes:** For evidence of their disloyalty to the Lord, they only had to look around.
- E. **Polluted the land:** There is a deep relationship between the condition of the land and the behavior of the people. Sin has serious negative consequences on the land. Sin can defile or pollute the land (3:2, 9; cf. Lev. 18:25, 28; 19:29; Num. 35:34; Deut. 24:4; Hos. 4:2-3; 6:10; Amos 4:6-10).
- F. **Drought:** The early (October-November) and latter rains (March-April) were withheld because of Judah's sin. The drought is related to sin on the land (14:1-6; Rev. 11:3, 6).
- G. **Cry to Me:** From this time on, they were to cry out to the Father and refuse to do evil.

IV. JUDAH'S SIN IS GREATER THAN ISRAEL'S (JER. 3:6-10)

- A. Judah did not learn from what Israel suffered in the Assyrian captivity in 721 BC (3:6-10). The northern kingdom of Israel had been judged by God because of her persistent harlotries.
- ⁶The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: “Have you seen [considered] what backsliding Israel has done [100 years earlier]? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot. ⁷I said, after she had done all these things, ‘Return to Me.’ But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. ⁸Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. ⁹So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. ¹⁰And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense,” says the LORD. (Jer. 3:6-10)*
- B. *In the days of Josiah*: God spoke to Jeremiah during Josiah’s reform which started in 628 BC.
- C. *Backsliding Israel*: The Hebrew word “*meshuba*” for backsliding is “*apostasy*” (3: 6, 8, 11, 12).
- D. *Have you seen*: God asked if Jeremiah grasped the implications of Israel’s sin leading to 721 BC. Historically, until the days of Manasseh only 35 years after Israel had been judged by God in the Assyria invasion in 721 BC, Judah had not engaged in idolatry to the extent that Israel had.
- E. *Certificate of divorce*: This “certificate” was in the form of suffering the Assyrian captivity. The northern kingdom’s relationship with God was broken in 721 BC when Assyria defeated Israel.
- F. *Did not fear*: Judah’s response to God’s judgment in the 721 BC military crisis in Israel was to boldly continue in sin. Israel in the end times has access to much information: the historical details of God’s judgments on their land throughout history—721 BC, 586 BC, and AD 70.
- ⁴Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)*
- G. *Casual harlotry*: Because Judah was so dull, she was light-hearted about the significance of her sin, God’s judgment, the privilege of relating to God, and enjoying His eternal blessings.
- H. *Judah returned to God in pretense*: There was clear evidence that Israel greatly suffered under God’s judgment in 721 BC due to disregarding her covenant with the Lord. Yet Judah did not turn to God “with her whole heart,” but only in pretense. Manasseh’s 55-year reign (697-642 BC) had a stronger hold on Judah than Josiah’s 20 years of reform (628-609 BC).
- I. God wants Israel and the body of Christ to learn from what occurred in His historical judgments.
- J. The term “Israel” may speak of the exiles in the northern kingdom; sometimes it includes Judah who never ceased to be part of the “whole people Israel.” So he referred to the northern kingdom as “the house of Israel” or “Ephraim” and sometimes to Judah including the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The northern kingdom did not exist in Jeremiah’s day; many of its people were absorbed into Assyria. Judah was all that remained of Israel as far as the worship of the Lord was concerned.

V. ISRAEL WILL RETURN TO GOD AND HIS FAVOR (JER. 3:11-18)

- A. The Lord called Israel to repent (3:12-14a) and gave her glorious promises (3:14b-18). Jeremiah called Israel, or the exiles of the former northern kingdom, to repentance.

¹¹The LORD said to me, “Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. ¹²Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: ‘Return, backsliding Israel... I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful... ¹³Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD... ¹⁴Return, O backsliding children,” (Jer. 3:11-14)

1. ***More righteous:*** Israel was less guilty than Judah since Judah was warned by the tragic events in the northern kingdom as an example of God’s judgment.
 2. ***Toward the north:*** The immediate application was for the exiles from Northern Israel. Josiah took back some of the former territory of Israel as the Assyrian empire was growing weaker (2 Kgs. 23:19-20). These words were also designed to provoke Judah and will also have an application to the end-time remnant of Israel in the lands of the north (3:18; 16:15; 23:8).
¹⁴“...the days are coming...that it shall no more be said, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ ¹⁵but, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land...” (Jer. 16:14-15)
 3. ***Return:*** The message to return shows the Lord’s extravagant mercy (3:2, 7, 12, 14, 22).
 4. ***Acknowledge your sin:*** God requires all individuals, including national Israel, to acknowledge their sin to Him (3:13, 21, 24-25; cf. 2:23, 35; Hos. 5:13).
- B. The Holy Spirit will reveal Jesus as the Bridegroom King and will raise up shepherds like David (3:14-15).

¹⁴“Return, O backsliding children...for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. ¹⁵And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” (Jer. 3:14-15)

1. ***I am married to you:*** The revelation of the Messiah as the Bridegroom God is a vital part of the restoration of Israel (2:2; 3:14; 31:3, 32; Hos. 2:15; cf. Isa. 45:5; 62:5).
2. ***I will give you shepherds after My heart:*** David was a man after God’s heart (1 Sam. 13:14). What the Lord will do in fullness when He returns, He will do in part in this age. David committed to obey the commands of God’s heart, to study the emotions of God’s heart, and to serve the purposes of God’s heart for his generation (Acts 13:22, 36; cf. Ps. 27:4; 145:1-13).
¹⁴...The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart...” (1 Sam. 13:14)
3. ***Who will feed you with knowledge:*** The end-time shepherds will feed the people on the knowledge and understanding of God’s heart, being students of God’s emotions like David.

- C. The Lord will release great blessing on Israel in the millennial kingdom (3:16-18).
¹⁶“Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land...they will say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It shall not come to mind...nor shall it be made anymore. ¹⁷At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to... Jerusalem...No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. ¹⁸In 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...to your fathers.”
(Jer. 3:14-18)
- D. *Multiplied in the land:* The population and the land will be blessed in a supernatural way.
- E. *Ark of the covenant:* The reason they will not think of the ark is because Jesus will be enthroned in Jerusalem. The ark will be understood as being a prophetic token of Jerusalem being filled with God’s glory (Isa. 60-62; Zech. 6:12-13; Mt. 19:28, 25:31).
- F. *Jerusalem called The Throne of the Lord:* Jerusalem will be the capital city of the whole earth.
³¹When the Son of Man comes in His glory...then He will sit on the throne of His glory.
³²All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them... (Mt. 25:31-32)
- G. *Walking in obedience:* No more shall the Jewish people follow the dictates of their evil hearts.
- H. *National unity:* The people of Judah shall walk in unity with the house of Israel (Isa. 11:12-13; Ezek. 37:16; 17; Hos 1:11).

VI. THE LORD’S DESIRE TO GIVE ISRAEL A BEAUTIFUL HERITAGE (JER. 3:19-20)

- A. God’s plan has always been to give His people a glorious inheritance on earth in context to an intimate relationship with the Lord as both Father and Bridegroom. God is the Father of His family, and Jesus is the Bridegroom, ruling with His eternal companion, the redeemed throughout history.
¹⁹“But I said: ‘How can I put you among the children and give you a pleasant land, a beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?’ And I said: ‘You shall call Me, “My Father,” and not turn away from Me.’ ²⁰Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,” says the LORD. (Jer. 3:19-20)
- B. *Beautiful heritage:* They will live with Jesus in Jerusalem and have access to His holy mountain with living conditions comparable to the garden of Eden.
- C. *My Father:* In their troubles, they were to cry out, “My Father” (3:4), but they did not obey Him (3:5).
- D. *Treacherously departs:* The Lord wants His people to know that He fully understands their sin and rebellion when He calls them to be a part of His family forever.

VII. ISRAEL'S NATIONAL REPENTANCE IN THE END TIMES (JER. 3:21-25)

- A. In the future, the Jewish people will weep and pray in repentance on the hill tops (3:21-25). Jeremiah prophetically described Israel's humble confession and grateful obedience to the Lord.
- ²¹*A voice was heard on the desolate heights, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel ...* ²²*"I will heal your backslidings." "Indeed we do come to You, for You are the LORD our God.* ²³*Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills...truly, in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.* ²⁴*For shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth—their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.* ²⁵*We lie down in our shame...for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day..." (Jer. 3:21-25)*
- B. **Desolate heights:** They will worship the Lord in the very places where they previously engaged in spiritual harlotry (3:2, 6).
- C. **Weeping:** With earnest prayer, Israel will experience deep anguish over their sin (Isa. 63:7-64:12; Zech. 12:10-14). Zechariah describes Israel's national repentance and conversion (12:10-14).
- ¹⁰*"I will pour on...Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me [Jesus] whom they have pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son." (Zech. 12:10)*
1. **Mourning:** Israel will mourn when they see that Jesus, whom they killed, is their Messiah. They will weep as if their firstborn son had been murdered. This describes repentance unto salvation, with weeping caused by despair over their sin and rejection of Jesus. Mourning for an only son was proverbial for intense and bitter grief (Jer. 6:26; Amos 8:10).
 2. **Look on Me:** Israel will see Jesus and grieve for Him. As Jesus called Saul of Tarsus to look on Him, so He will call the whole nation to look. Paul's conversion is a prophetic foreshadowing of Israel's national salvation. They will be as surprised as Paul was to discover that Jesus of Nazareth is the God of Israel.
- D. **I will heal:** The Lord will heal their backslidings. There is no sin that is more powerful than God's grace for those who will ask the Lord to heal them. Israel is a picture of how far God will go.
- E. **We come to You:** Israel will return to God, seeing the vanity of seeking for salvation in other things.
- F. **Shame has devoured:** Israel will make the ultimate acknowledgment that it was their sin that led to their labor, property (flocks and herds), and people (sons and daughters) being devoured from their youth. To refer to their "youth" is to reach back through 3,500 years to the time that God made the covenant with them at Mt. Sinai immediately after they were delivered out of Egypt with Moses.
- G. **We have sinned:** Israel will acknowledge that they have sinned against the Lord, that their fathers, from their early days in Egypt even to this day, have not obeyed the voice of God (3:25).
- H. Many commentators see 4:1-4 as concluding this message. The Lord described what genuine repentance and returning to Him involves, which includes making real changes in their national and personal lives as described in 4:1-4.