

“A Call to Repentance” (Jeremiah 3:1–25)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (12/1/2019)

Introduction

1. Jeremiah 3 continues God’s indictment of Judah’s forsaking of the Lord.
 - a. Verses 1–5, it is suggested by some commentators, belong to the previous chapter.
 - b. On the other hand, these verses fit hand-in-glove with the Lord’s call for Judah to repent, which is the position that we are taking in this message.
2. The issue to be addressed in this message has to do with threats of judgment against the guilty.
 - a. Here is a principle: “*Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil*” (Ecclesiastes 8:11).
 - b. Here is a problem: Israel transgressed God’s commandments for hundreds of years, but in spite of the repeated warnings from God via the prophets, the judgment threatened did not immediately materialize.
 - c. Is this a contradiction? No, for the following reasons: (1) God is a just God; no sin will go unpunished, (2) God’s patience must never be mistaken for tolerance or neglect (2 Peter 3:9), (3) God’s ultimate purposes will always overrule His ordinary dealings with human sin, (4) whatever God does or does not do about sin, every sinner is fully responsible and must never take comfort in the absence of immediate punishment.

I. Provocative Questions

1. Judah’s great evil in forsaking her God
 - a. People tend to be blinded to their own sin, its nature and full extent, and their inability to resist, pridefully covering it as personal weakness over which they have little control; however, the truth is: (1) Judah had a *voracious appetite* for the foreign gods she followed (v. 1); (2) Judah sought opportunity to *expand* and *promote* her fixation on idolatrous pursuits (v. 2). The reference to an “*Arab in the wilderness*” is to be interpreted as their waiting by the wayside, (a) to intercept merchants traveling to markets in order to make deals for newer and better goods (in this case, *gods*), (b) to court others to join them in their wild pursuit of the forbidden, making them traitors and tempters.
 - b. Judah’s impudence polluted the holy land.
 - 1) Her sin was universal and brazen, and no one showed any remorse by blushing or shame.
 - 2) Sin does not make one a sinner; rather, sin reveals the true condition of the person as a sinner.
2. Judah was guilty of deceptively seeking a cover for her condition (v. 4).
 - a. Religion often serves as a cover for the most heinous of sins.
 - b. Religion is a valuable tool of Satan because it serves to deceive the sinner into a false security and a false impression of God’s favor.
3. The issue presented in Deuteronomy 24:1–4. Considering the Lord’s mention of this principle—
 - a. Should we not expect God to be wholly implacable with respect to Judah’s sin?
 - b. Could God ever forgive and restore such sinners?
4. The Lord’s patience and apparent withholding of judgment emboldened Judah’s rebellion.
 - a. This raises the question of exactly when the Lord would judge Judah’s flagrant sins.
 - b. Nevertheless, God graciously and patiently waited on these rebellious ones, pleading for repentance. He promised to receive the repentant. Yet, Judah would not repent but put the burden on the Lord: “*Will he be angry forever, will he be indignant to the end?*” (v. 5).

II. A Call to the Faithless

1. The days of Josiah (vv. 6–11)
 - a. Judah was in reprieve from her head-long rush to judgment. In this period, the Lord called upon Judah to take a hard look at the condition of her sister, Israel to the north. Because Israel did not repent of her sins—the same sins Judah was pursuing—she was *divorced* by the Lord and sent away forever.
 - b. Judah did not learn the lesson of Israel nor fear the Lord but took her sinning lightly. Although there was some reform, “*Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the Lord*” (v. 10).
2. Faithless Israel showed herself more righteous than treacherous Judah; thus, Jeremiah was instructed to proclaim the call to Israel to return (vv. 12, 13).
 - a. The Lord promised mercy to those who returned.
 - b. That return was preconditioned on two things: (1) Israel must acknowledge the guilt of her rebellion and idolatry, (2) Israel must confess that she had not obeyed her covenant Lord.

III. Promised Assurance

1. The remnant is the aim of divine purpose, and it is assured (vv. 14–18).
 - a. This assurance is based on Yahweh’s authority: “*Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master [ba-alti, meaning husband or lord, a word play on the Canaanite deity, Baal]*” (v. 14a).
 - b. This assurance is also based on Yahweh’s sovereign purpose—to take out of every nation a people for His name: “*I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion*” (v. 14b).
2. The spiritual significance of Zion (vv. 15–19).
 - a. Where the physical Zion failed, spiritual Zion will succeed (Hebrews 12:22ff.).
 - 1) They will be shepherded by godly men, resulting in true knowledge and understanding (v. 15).
 - 2) The “*ark of the covenant of the Lord*” will no longer be remembered—meaning that the old mercy seat will be replaced by the true one, Jesus Christ (v. 16).
 - 3) Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord (v. 17).
 - b. The Lord closes this section with a great promise in verse 19. The Lord asks how He can put the godly shepherds, access to the Savior, and His throne in the midst of a rebellious people? He will not. He will change their hearts so that they will call to Him as Father and not ever turn away from Him. There will be a true unity (Ephesians 2:14–16).
2. The remainder of the chapter returns to Judah’s behavior as the treacherous wife and Yahweh’s continued calls for her repentance and return (vv. 22, 23).

What to Take Away

1. What may seem like the Lord’s neglect of action against sins and stubborn rebellion is actually the Lord’s patience awaiting His timing. Believers must learn to wait on the Lord and never presume that silence is acceptance. Believers must search their own lives in light of His truth and seek the Spirit of God for the gift of repentance.
2. Repentance requirements: There must be honest recollection of one’s sins with appropriate grief and godly sorrow. This examination must focus on where and when guilt occurred. Our tendency is vague generality to hide, obscure, and self-excuse our sins. We must repent, not to recover reputation so much as to bring glory to God.