

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JER. 3:11 And the LORD said unto me, The backsliding Israel hath justified herself more than treacherous Judah.

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.

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:

15 And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall 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.

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.

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.

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

NOTES

God Gathers All Nations

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 3:11-20

Related Scriptures: Acts 2:36-41; 1 Peter 5:1-4;
Ezekiel 37:15-28; Revelation 7:4-12; Jeremiah 3:1-10

TIME: between 627 and 609 B.C.

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—"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" (Jeremiah 3:17).

Lesson Exposition

A SURPRISING REVERSAL— Jer. 3:11

The nation of Israel had corporately turned away from the worship of the Lord and had become a syncretistic, idolatrous nation under the reign of their first king, Jeroboam (931-910 B.C.).

Jeroboam had intentionally instituted new religious practices for his newly formed kingdom of northern Israel to prevent the northern tribes from falling under the spiritual (and political) influence of Judah through participation in the temple worship at Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 12:26-33).

King Josiah organized a lavish celebration of Passover (2 Chr. 35:1-19). Another good king, Hezekiah, had previously arranged a Passover celebration, inviting not only those under his reign in Judah but also the Israelites in the north (2 Chr. 30). Although in general Israel wandered from the Lord, some remained faithful (cf. 1 Kgs. 19:18).

The opening statement of Jeremiah 3:11 is preceded by a stern rebuke to both Israel and Judah. Further, it would have been startling to hear that de-

spite having had some good rulers, Judah had still sunk into depravity and idolatry and was somehow worse than Israel! From what follows, however, it becomes clear that this is the opening of a word of hope to the people of Israel and Judah.

A CALL TO REPENTANCE— Jer. 3:12-14

A proclamation of hope (Jer. 3:12). Having described the judgment of which Israel and Judah were worthy, the Lord God now issued a proclamation and call for repentance. God told Jeremiah to proclaim His message to the north.

The north could be a reference to the remnant of Israelites from the northern tribes still present there, or it could be a reference to Assyria, the land of their exile even farther to the north. The call to return to God may have anticipated a return for the northern or southern tribes from their respective places of exile.

Acknowledgment of sin (Jer. 3:13). Having opened with an exhortation to repent, the Lord began to describe what that would look like. The first el-

ement was confession. In the case of the Israelites, this included the sins of idolatry and polytheism. This not only included leaders (such as the evil kings Manasseh and Amon) but also included the spread of idolatry and wicked practices among the common people throughout the nation.

Return to the Lord (Jer. 3:14). This verse begins again with an exhortation to God's children to turn away from backsliding, which can be thought of as the opposite of repentance. In a surprising turn of phrase, God said to the Israelites that He was their Husband, perhaps referencing the covenant made at Sinai.

Moreover, the Hebrew word *ba'al* can be translated as "husband," "master," or even as the name of the Canaanite deity Baal, the god of the storm. There is an underlying irony here, for a significant element of the people's unfaithfulness was their devotion to Baal. God was saying that they need no other *ba'al* than Him.

God displays a picture of the path of salvation in this chapter, showing the counterpoints of turning toward God in repentance or turning away from God in unfaithfulness. The passage begins with a call to repentance, including an exhortation to confession of sin to God. Then we see that God invites us into His family, dwelling, and presence.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE— Jer. 3:15-18

A change of leadership (Jer. 3:15). In verses 15-18, the prophet shifted perspective to speak of future events. The promises were deeply poignant and point to what God would do in, through, and among the people of Israel, Judah, and the nations as well. The promises described here include a future unification of the people of Israel and Judah in a manner that would also

include all nations. Collectively, these promises pointed to a dramatic fulfillment in the future.

Part of the grace, mercy, and blessing that the Lord promised to give to repentant Israelites was godly "pastors" or shepherds—leaders who would nourish those under their care with knowledge and understanding. This likely referred to rulers in David's line but ultimately foreshadowed Jesus, the coming Messiah (cf. John 10:11; Matt. 21:4-5).

A promise of multiplication (Jer. 3:16). There are two parts to the promise in verse 16, or perhaps two promises that blend into one another. The first was of fruitfulness and multiplication. After the devastations the people had suffered in the recent past, our text points to a future time of population growth for Jerusalem, under the wise leadership promised in verse 15.

The second promise was likely shocking to the people: no one would speak any longer of the ark of the covenant, and it would be neither missed nor replaced.

The ark represented God's presence, and it was where God had told Moses that He would meet with him (Ex. 25:22). But with the description of this future dynamic, Jeremiah revealed that the place of God's manifest presence would expand beyond the ark, the throne of the Lord (Jer. 3:17).

A city as a throne (Jer. 3:17). One day there would be no further need for the ark of the covenant as the locus of God's presence. Verse 17 continues the thought, declaring that the whole city of Jerusalem would be considered the throne of God! God's presence would gloriously break out from the inner sanctum of the temple that housed the ark to encompass all of Jerusalem.

Even more remarkably, Jeremiah revealed that the nations would be gathered there in the name of the Lord and

that they would no longer walk in the stubbornness of their hearts. Here the promise took a turn that emphasized the mission of God: this was not merely about God's work among Israel and Judah. God's purposes included all the nations.

A reunion of Israel and Judah (Jer. 3:18). The text continues, noting that God would bring back both branches of the people from the land of the north to the land of their inheritance. God would restore and reunite the people of Israel and Judah and would do so in the broader context of a call to repentance, transformation, and mission to the surrounding nations.

We see close parallels between the future transformation described in vss. 15-18 and the new covenant passage in Jeremiah 31:31-34, where the presence and covenant of God no longer depended on the presence of the ark of the covenant and the Old Testament Law.

A LONGING FATHER—Jer. 3:19

The text circles back to the theme of repentance and God's fatherly heart for His children. He desired to bless them and to bring them into the land of their inheritance. He wanted them to call Him Father and follow Him.

He used the language of turning once again, desiring that they would not again turn away from following Him. He deserved a response of gratitude from His people, yet He received only anguish. Despite their continued rebellion, God remained willing to extend forgiveness if they would repent.

Verse 19 leaves us with a sense of God's pain when His people turned away from Him. This pain was not due to insecurity but to a knowledge of His people and of the reality that their repentance and joining their lives to Him would be the very best thing for them.

God desired the repentance and restoration of Israel. He also called the

nations to repent. As we see in verses 16-17, it was a transforming mission, one in which people from all nations walk in the presence of God.

A BETRAYED HUSBAND—Jer. 3:20

The text moves on from the metaphor of God as a longing Father and returns to that of God as a betrayed Husband, portraying the Israelites as a treacherous wife. In spite of all that He offered her, the house of Israel continued to walk in unfaithfulness, idolatry, and wickedness.

Even amid the disappointment with the unfaithfulness displayed in verse 20, a look back to verse 14 indicates that the call to repentance and its promises remained valid.

—Matthew Friedman

QUESTIONS

1. What did Jeroboam intentionally do to minimize the influence of Judah within Israel?
2. What kings of Judah reached out to Israelites?
3. Why would God's statement in Jeremiah 3:11 have been startling?
4. What did it mean for Jeremiah to speak "toward the north" (vs. 12)?
5. What was ironic about the Lord calling Himself their Husband?
6. What did the Lord mean by "pastors" (vs. 15)?
7. Why would the absence of the ark be a good thing?
8. How was God's plan greater than merely restoring Israel and Judah?
9. What would God do for the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah?
10. What two metaphors are repeated in this passage?

—Matthew Friedman

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Our assessment of how righteous someone is can often be mistaken (Jer. 3:11).
2. The Lord urges all people to repent and will always welcome them through Christ (vss. 12-14).
3. Godly leaders are a blessing. Ask the Lord for godly leaders (vs. 15)!
4. We experience greater blessings than old covenant Israel (vs. 16).
5. God's children include people from all nations, and we should seek to reach them all (vss. 17-18).
6. The Lord is eager to bless His people, so they must turn to Him (vs. 19).
7. If we are faithless, we should repent (vs. 20, cf. vs. 12).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. If we are not literally bowing to idols, how do we commit idolatry today?
2. If the Lord loves us, why does He require us to repent before He restores us?
3. Does the Lord get angry with Christians?
4. What does genuine repentance look like?
5. What does it look like for a leader to have God's heart?
6. Why do we not miss the ark of the covenant?
7. How should Christians think about Jerusalem (and Israel) today?
8. Can God ever be mistaken or surprised (cf. Jer. 3:19)?
9. Why is sin compared with unfaithfulness and adultery?

—Tom Greene

Golden Text Illuminated

"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" (Jeremiah 3:17).

The golden text for this lesson speaks of a glorious future when Jerusalem will be known as the throne of the Lord, and all nations will gather there to worship Him. This prophecy, given through Jeremiah, reveals the inclusive nature of God's salvation plan, extending far beyond the borders of Israel to encompass the entire world.

From the very beginning, God's heart has been for all nations. When He called Abraham, He promised that through him, all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). This theme of universal blessing runs throughout the Old Testament, even as God works particularly with the nation of Israel.

In the context of Jeremiah's prophecy, Israel and Judah were facing judgment for their persistent idolatry and unfaithfulness to God. Yet amid these dire warnings, God provides a glimpse of a future hope—a time when not only Israel but all nations will turn to Him in worship and obedience.

The golden text paints a picture of a transformed Jerusalem, no longer a city plagued by idolatry and sin but a place where God's presence dwells and His name is honored. It will be a gathering place for all nations, a center of worship and devotion to the one true God.

As we look forward to the day when all nations will gather in Jerusalem to worship the Lord, let us pray fervently for the spread of the gospel.

—Gene Kissinger