

Jer. 2:1-3:5, Israel's Twofold Faithlessness

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H. Van Dyke Parunak

A. Oracular Structure

Note IF's at 2:1,4; 3:6. Thus the chapter division at 3:1 is not optimal.

At 2:1, the Lord speaks to Jeremiah; at 2:4, Jeremiah turns to the people. As a separate, dated oracle, 3:6ff is quite distinct.

Imagine a divorced couple breaking up their household. He gets the toaster; she gets the frying pan. He gets the lawn mower; she gets the garden hose. All goes well until they open a box that contains their wedding pictures--and suddenly they realize how far they have fallen from the happiness they once knew. So here, 2:1-3, like an album of wedding pictures, recalls the people's past faithfulness and how God protected them then. 2:4-3:5 shows how far they have strayed from that beginning.

B. 2:1-3, The Original Relationship

1. v.2, God's Remembrance.

- a) Not just "I remember thee," but "I remember for thee, to thy account, for thy sake."
- b) Cf. Lev. 26:44,45. There God promises that even though Israel should break his covenant, yet he will remember it for their sake. Same expression here, and sketches out the whole direction of the book!
- c) What does he remember?
 - 1) "The covenant faithfulness [XESSED] of thy (fem.) youth." Hos. 2:15; 11:1; when Israel came out of Egypt. The allusion here is probably to YHWH's faithfulness to his covenant promises to the fathers to bring Israel back out of bondage (Gen. 15:16).
 - 2) "The love of your courtship," picturing the Lord binding Israel to himself in covenant at Mount Sinai. The tender relationship between the young nation and its God.
 - 3) "Your going after me in the wilderness." So deep was Israel's young trust in God that she followed him even through the barren desert.

2. v.3a, the resulting Relationship. "Holiness" is a title applied to the sacrifices, as God's peculiar property. "Firstfruits" is a particular sacrifice. Thus Israel is depicted as God's special possession. She not only gives sacrifices; she is a sacrifice. Cf. Rom. 12:1, where the believer gives himself.

3. 3b, Thus punishment falls on any who abuse her. Whoever harms God's people, abuses him, and will have to answer to him.
4. **Application:** Like Israel, we are God's possession, and under his protection. But remember that this is only the start. Israel came to presume on God's protection, and as a result fell under his chastisement. Other nations that could never have touched her, now were given free rein over her. So we must not presume upon the security that God gives us.

C. 2:4-3:5, Overview

1. 2:9 says that God is "pleading" (*ryb*) with this generation and its descendants. The verb is common in the Pentateuch for a legal proceeding, and the basic meaning is "accuse," "lodge a complaint." God is going to spell out what Israel has done.

This is a common form of speech in the prophets, and typically contains the following elements. These are all in Jeremiah 2, though they do not dominate the structure and so we will not spend lots of time on them.

- a) Convocation of witnesses, often including cosmic elements (cf. v.12).
 - b) Use of questions to address the accused (throughout the chapter).
 - c) Contrast of the plaintiff's past gracious acts and the accused's rejection of them (5-8).
 - d) Vanity of cultic corrections, whether orthodox or foreign. (22-23; 27-28; 33-35).
 - e) Sentence or warning (2:25; 3:4: entreaty to return).
2. Prominent correspondences show the presence of two parallel halves:
 - a) Lists of leaders in 2:8 vs. 26;
 - b) "Where is <Deity>" in 2:6,8 vs. 28;
 - c) Special word for "plead" in 29 vs. 29;
 - d) Triple question about identity in 2:14 vs. 31;
 - e) Reference to Egypt and Assyria in 2:15-18 vs. 36
 3. Suggest major break within each half at the triple question, 2:14 vs. 31. In each case, before this question the issues are idolatry, while after it they are immorality (except at the end, where idolatry is worked back in).
 4. So the basic dynamic is indicting Israel for her idolatry and immorality; yet at the very end of both halves, the Lord entreats her to return to him.

D. 2:4-13, First Indictment for Idolatry

1. v.5, The opening question (typical of *rib*)
Their conduct is so contemptuous against the Lord, the only reasonable explanation for it is that they have found some fault in him.

Note the progress: depart from him, follow Vanity (= idols), then become vain themselves, like the idols they follow.
2. v.6-8, the Historical Account
 - a) 6-7, what God did for them.
 - 1) Out of Egypt
 - 2) Through the wilderness
 - 3) Into Canaan
 - b) 7b,8b, what the people did: defiled the land by idolatry
 - c) What the people did not do: say "Where is the Lord?" Cf. Ps. 44:9,23. The statement, "Where is God, who used to do all these wonderful things for us?" is one that we would expect from the people in time of trouble, turning back to the Lord, remembering his mighty works of old, and humbling themselves to seek his aid once again. But this is exactly what they are NOT doing.
 - d) 8, the leaders grew perverse. "Pastors," "shepherds," probably refers to kings. Everyone who could influence the society toward righteousness is corrupt, not only the kings and princes, but also the priests and prophets.
3. 9-13, The Lord's Response: zeroes in on the sin of idolatry, "other gods before me," by calling attention to two ways in which it is unthinkable.
 - a) 10-11, it is without parallel among other nations.
 - 1) The two places mentioned are a merism, spanning east to west.
 - a> Chittim: a city on Cyprus, later comes to be a term for Cyprus, Greece, and westward.
 - b> Kedar: an Arabian tribe to the east.
 - 2) These countries worship gods that are not real gods, but still they would never trade them. But Israel has thrown away the one true God!
 - b) 12-13, it is without reason.
 - 1) Appeal to heavens: fits with *rib* pattern, cf. Isa. 1.
 - 2) YHWH is a fountain of living water. Not only a source of water, but a spring, thus clear, fresh water.

3) What they have chosen instead are cisterns. At best, these are full of scum, algae, and mosquito larvae--stale water. But the pagan gods are worse than that. They are broken cisterns, so that even the stale water runs out!

4. **Application:** Trace parallels to Israel's case in ours.

a) God has brought us out of bondage into freedom, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

b) Our memory verse last week taught us that "covetousness ... is idolatry." Just as the Israelites were tempted to forget God and follow after Baal, we are tempted to forget God and follow after the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.

c) We need to remember how ridiculous such a trade is in the light of eternal values.

E. 2:14-25, **First Indictment for Immorality**

F. 2:26-30, **Second Indictment for Idolatry**

G. 2:31-3:5, **Second Indictment for Immorality**