

Jer. 2:14-3:5, Israel's Twofold Faithlessness

May 26, 1989

H. Van Dyke Parunak

A. 2:1-3:5, Overview

1. 2:1-3 sets forth the original relation between God and his people at the time of the Exodus and conquest; 2:4-3:5 is a *ryb*, a formal accusation itemizing what Israel has done.
2. Prominent correspondences show the presence of two parallel halves, dividing at 2:25.
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.
5. The second section, 2:14-25, indicts Israel for immorality (no explicit emphasis on idolatry), and consists of a chiasm followed by an alternation. The emphasis in both is on Israel's sin, but in the chiasm that sin is compared with the troubles that result from it, while in the alternation it is contrasted with the blessings that the nation has rejected in order to indulge in it. Graphically, we may chart Israel's trajectory:

	Blessings		Sin		Troubles
Chiasm:			X	->	X
Alt:	X	->	X		

B. 2:14-18, Chiasm: Israel's present troubles and their cause.

1. First Panel: 2:14, The Triple Question
The first two elements of the question suggest a possible (but not actual) cause for the effect described in the third. The rest of the section expounds the result, and shows what the real causes are.
 - a) Result: "Why is he spoiled?" Not like a spoiled child, but why have foreign enemies been allowed to spoil him, to invade and ravish the nation?
 - b) Cause: The first two questions suggest a possible cause, which we will end up rejecting: perhaps Israel is only a slave, and that's why he's abused. Even ordinary slaves could be redeemed, but as a "homeborn slave," one born in the household with no other family to speak for him, there would be no one to redeem him; he would be the most subject to abuse. But this is not the reason. His suffering is not due to the fickleness of a cruel master, but due to his own sin.

2. Second Panel: 2:15-18, Egypt and Assyria

- a) "Lions" in 15 may be metaphor for Assyria (cf. Amos 3:12; Isa. 5:29; Nah. 2:12-13); "Noph and Tahapanes" in 16 are cities in Egypt. So we have here the same two powers as in v.18. Cf. 50:17,18. Assyria and Babylon are to be distinguished, but both are "lions."
- b) The spoiling, 15-16:
- 1) Cities destroyed on military raids
 - 2) "Broken the crown of thy head," better, "grazed on the crown of thy head." Need to note that "thy" here is feminine singular; Israel is portrayed as a woman, whose enemies have shaved her bald to put her to shame.
- c) The cause, 17-18, note repetition of "way"
- 1) 17: They have forsaken the Lord, when he led them. Even on the way out of Egypt, they began the habit of turning away from him.
 - 2) 18: Their history has been full of following other "ways," seeking protection from the large powers on either side of them, rather than from the Lord. Note the water imagery; muddy river water ("Sihor," a name for the Nile, means "black") is only barely better than cistern water, cf. v.13. At the earliest, recall the trouble Abram had from going into Egypt in Gen. 12.
- d) **Application:** What constitutes "Egypt" and "Assyria" for us? What are we inclined to trust, instead of the Lord? Money? Health foods and jogging? Allergists? Our job?

The Lord can use all of these, and more, to aid his people, as when he used Pharaoh to provide for Joseph and Jacob. But when we see these as the source rather than the channel of blessing, we have forsaken the Lord. And that makes no sense! The Lord is a spring of sweet, fresh, cool water, compared with the filthy mud that the world offers.

C. **2:19-25, Alternation: Israel's Sin in the Face of Grace**

In both panels we have

1. an insistence that Israel cannot deny her sin, emphasized with the imperatives "see" and "know";
2. a comparison of her with an unruly animal, first tame, then wild;
3. a description of her rejection of God's past and future blessings.

1. 19, 22-23b. Israel cannot deny her sin.

a) 19 sums this up in four solemn pairs.

- 1) 19a, The sin itself will be the means of chastising her. Cf. Gal., "whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

- 2) "Know and see." Not just with the mind, but with the eyes; they are to experience this, not just hear about it second-hand.
 - 3) "It is an evil thing and bitter." Not just abstractly wicked, but exceedingly unpleasant to those who experience it. God does not warn his people away from sin because he is an old Scrooge who hates fun, but because he knows the bitter dregs that those who follow such a course will have to drink.
 - 4) "thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and my fear is not in thee." Failure to fear the Lord in his power and wrath is part of forsaking him.
- b) 2:22-23b, False protestation of innocence
- 1) Their iniquity is marked, lit. "stained," before the Lord's eyes.
 - 2) The harshest detergents cannot remove it: washing soda and lye.
 - 3) They impudently insist that they have not followed the Baals.
 - 4) "See thy way in the Valley [of Hinnom]." Look at the path you have worn in the grass, on your way to the pagan altars. How can you say such a thing? The picture is that of a little boy, with his hand in the cookie jar, saying, "I wasn't taking any cookies."
- c) **Application:** One of the strongest marks of spiritual health is a recognition of one's own sinfulness and a receptivity to correction. In these pictures, Israel tries to hide her sin. The believer welcomes correction. Prov. 9:7-9; 10:17; 12:15; 13:1,18; 15:32. Especially important for the youngsters (note how often Proverbs talks about a father's counsel), but also for older believers in their dealings with one another.
2. 20, 23c-24. Israel is compared with an unruly animal. Three, in fact:
- a) 20, A rebellious ox. The verb endings are archaic second persons, which look like first person endings, but the smoothest rendering is, "For of old time [thou hast] broken thy yoke, and burst thy bands; and thou saidst, I will not [serve]." We see the beast smashing the yoke against a rock until it is splintered, then pulling away from the cords that fasten it to the plow until they break. The end of the verse becomes literal, showing that Israel's rebellion was specifically in participating in the immorality of the Canaanite fertility cults. The image and the literal are merged in the next two pictures, which are of animals in heat, crazed by their instincts.

- b) 23c, a young camel in heat, "traversing" = "intertwining" her ways. Running back and forth in complete confusion, looking for a male.
 - c) 24, a wild ass in heat. She has scented a male, and now nothing can keep her back from rushing after him. So Israel has gone after immorality.
 - d) **Application:** These are very graphic pictures of the zeal with which the wicked run after sin. They should caution us about our enthusiasm for sin. But they should equally rebuke us for our *lack* of enthusiasm for serving the Lord! We would not use these same images; Jeremiah has chosen them for their vulgarity, with good effect. But does our zeal for the Lord come anywhere near the unbeliever's zeal for sin and wickedness?
3. 21, 25. Israel's sin is in the face of God's past and future blessings.
- a) 21, Past Blessings. God established Israel with a pure pedigree; the seed of Abraham, with wives from the same stock to Isaac and Jacob, thus avoiding contamination from the Canaanites, and then to Egypt where they were sequestered so that they could grow into nationhood without contamination. He planted the best grapes, but got wild, sour ones; cf. Isa. 5, from which this draws!
 - b) 25, Future Blessings.
 - 1) Invitation: The wild animals of 23-24 will reap the fruit of their lust; the camel will wear out her feet; the ass will grow hoarse with braying. Follow the Lord and avoid this suffering. Cf. 19a.
 - 2) Response: the people have sold out to following strangers--both strange people and their gods. NB: the danger of mixed marriage!
 - c) **Application:** The original lie of Satan in the garden was that God was withholding good from his people. Jeremiah's message is that the happiest way is God's way. Now, in the light of the NT revelation, we can see this even more clearly: Rom. 8:31,32.