

Jer. 3:19-4:2: Recalling God's Dealings with Israel

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A. Overview of the Book so Far

1. ch. 1: Jeremiah's call
2. ch. 2: God's *rebuke* against Judah; formal complaint. Her idolatry and alliances with other nations, turning from the Lord.
3. ch. 3-6: The Coming Judgment.
 - a) 3:6-10, Everyone can see how Judah fails to learn from Israel.
 - b) 3:11-4:2, Recollection of God's dealings with Israel.
 - 1) God's offer to Israel of salvation, 3:12-18. Commands + Promises.
 - 2) *** His own desire for their return, and their rebellion, 3:19-20
 - 3) *** His persistent engagement with them, 3:21-4:2
 - c) 4:3-6:30, consequences on "men of Judah and Jerusalem" (4:3) for failing to heed Israel's example.

B. 3:19-20, God's unrequited love toward Israel

One of the most painful experiences of adolescence is unrequited love--when you love someone who does not love you back. Cf. Anita and me at Princeton. Here God shows how Israel has not returned his love. He outlines his gracious plans for them, and then their curt response.

This section is an aside. The previous section was what Jeremiah was to cry toward the north. Now God muses with Jeremiah over his own divine intent, and in the third part of this section, God describes the history of his interaction with Israel.

1. 19, God's Loving Plan: Two elements. What he will do, and how they will respond. Each introduced by "And I said."
 - a) What God will do. NB: First word should be rendered "Surely," as an emphatic statement, not "How," as a question.
 - 1) He will make them prestigious among the other nations. "Sons:" Israel's position as God's first-born (31:9; Exod. 4:22) suggests that the other nations are his children as well. Cf. Acts 17:29. True, these other children are rebellious, and will receive a father's just wrath for their sin; but Israel is no better than they at this point.
 - 2) He will give them a pleasant land, an inheritance that is an ornament of ornaments. This returns to the promise to Abraham

and the other patriarchs, which underlies all of the prophets.

- b) What he plans for them to do.
 - 1) They will acknowledge him as their father.
 - 2) They will not turn away from him ("turn" vocabulary again).

2. 20, Their Response: rejection. Like an unfaithful wife, they have turned away from him.

3. **Comment:** What happened to God's sovereignty? Answer: the story isn't over yet. God will turn Israel back to himself, and his gracious purposes toward them will one day be accomplished.

C. **3:21-4:2, God continues to woo Israel.**

This section is structured like a little drama. It starts with a stage setting. Then God speaks, then Israel, then God again. It ends in suspense: we do not know what the outcome will be.

- 1. Israel's disconsolate sorrow in the face of sin.

"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked," and Israel here is weeping in her sin, crying out to God after all else has failed.

 - a) The reason: they have perverted their way and forgotten the Lord.
 - b) The "high places" are rather the caravan paths, cf. the parallel in 3:2. The noun means "smooth place," to be distinguished from the groves where they worshiped idols. In their idolatry, they have "imported" gods to replace the Lord.
 - c) Now they cry out in their supplications. "Supp." are almost always to God. This is the agonized, desolate cry of the unbeliever to God when all else fails.
- 2. God's reply, 22a. We have seen already that they have no right to expect help in such circumstances: 3:1a "And now you return to me!"; 2:28 "Let them save you." But God does invite them to return. Of five words in this sentence, three are varieties of "turn": "Turn, turning sons; I-will-heal your-turnedness.
- 3. Israel, 22b-25. At this gentle invitation, the dam breaks, and Israel pours out a torrent of confession. This long section makes four points: (1) We are coming to YHWH (2) because there is no help elsewhere, (3) as seen by the shame we have suffered (4) as a result of our sin.
 - a) 22b, They own YHWH as their God and thus return to him.
 - b) 23, He, not the gods whose shrines are in the hills, is Israel's only savior.
 - c) 24-25a, They recognize this because of the shame they and their fathers have suffered. v. 24 is a striking

expression: in what sense does shame eat up their labor? Because God's judgments deprive them of material good? Or because they are finally learning, as would Saul of Tarsus, to "count all things but dung"? Thus: Shame has overwhelmed our sense of security in our possessions. Nor do we seek to hide it, but rather lie down in it.

d) 25b, This shame in turn results from their sin.

4. God, 4:1-2. The invitation is open to them.

a) Command: cf. 3:12,14.

1) Summary, 1a: If you're going to be a turner, let your turning be a turning to me.

2) Detail, 1b-2a: (Condition is all but last two clauses of 2, marked by change of subject)

a> Put away your abominations (the idols and their worship).

b> Do not wander (as you have perverted your way after the idols).

c> Let your oaths be in truth, judgment, and righteousness. Do not swear falsely.

3) **Application:** As sweet as Israel's words in the last response sound, she still needs to show the truth of her repentance by right action. Otherwise it is only feigned. When you say, "I'm sorry," we'll know it's true by whether or not you change.

b) Promise: The Gentiles will come to worship the Lord too. This was to be Israel's mission: bringing the world to the knowledge of God. But they can only succeed if they are right with him first.

c) **Application:** Like Israel, the effectiveness of our testimony depends on the faithfulness of our own walk with the Lord.