

Jeremiah Chapter 2

Verses 2:1 – 4:4: Jeremiah's preparation was over. God was ready to give him "the word of the Lord" for the nation – first an indictment and judgment against Judah for worshipping other gods (2:1-37), and then a call for the people to turn from their sinful ways before it is too late (3:1 – 4:4).

Verses 1-3: "Jerusalem ... Israel": Jeremiah pointed to the sensitivity of the Lord and His care from them in the early history (verse 21). After centuries, many were:

- (1) Far from God, whom they had forsaken (verses 5, 31);
- (2) Deep in idolatry (verses 11, 27-28); and
- (3) without true salvation (as verses 8; 5:10a).

Jeremiah 2:1 "Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,"

Here begins the book, and Jeremiah's first sermon; and the following contains the message he was sent with, to which the preceding chapter is only a preface or introduction. The Targum calls it, "the word of the prophecy from before the Lord."

The word "moreover" makes you think this is a continuation of what we heard in chapter 1. The LORD is still speaking to Jeremiah here.

Jeremiah 2:2 "Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land [that was] not sown."

The word translated "kindness" is often used in contexts dealing with covenant relationships. (See the note on 1 Sam. 20:14-17). The word often speaks of love that God shares with believers as members of His own family. Here, the establishment of the family relationship is emphasized by linking God's redemption of His people from Egypt, and the time that followed, to the loving period of early marriage. As the rest of the chapter unfolds, the imagery of the bride is used to catalog Israel's sins: she had been seduced into idolatry (verses 4-8); she had forsaken the refreshing waters of marriage for the broken cisterns of infidelity (verses 9-13); she had left her divine husband for a wayward life among the surrounding nations (verses 14-19); and she had stooped to the level of base spiritual harlotry by worshipping false gods and engaging in false religious practices (verses 20-28). Even veteran harlots would blush at what God's bride had done (verses 32-33). Her prostitution was both flagrant and incurable (verses 34-37). Accordingly, judgment must come. (For further instances of Israel as God's bride see Isaiah 54:4-17; Ezekiel Chapter 16; Hosea chapters 1-3).

Israel had been unfaithful to the Lord in the wilderness even before Moses brought the law down from Sinai (Exodus chapter 32; Ezek. 20:18-21), but compared to the present, Israel's love for the Lord then was like that of a betrothed bride for her groom (Ezek. 16:8).

This proclamation was for all the people. It was to be spoken so every ear could hear. The Hebrews would listen, when Jeremiah began with the statement "Thus saith the LORD". God has not overlooked the loyalty of their past. The LORD still loves His people. Their espousal was to God. They were the wife of the LORD. They sought God when they were in Egypt and helpless. God led them and cared for them 40 years in the wilderness. They were always repentant and thankful when God performed a miracle for them, but they would soon fall back into idolatry the minute the problem was over.

Jeremiah 2:3 "Israel [was] holiness unto the LORD, [and] the firstfruits of his increase: all that devour him shall offend; evil shall come upon them, saith the LORD."

“Firstfruits of his increase”: Israel was the first to worship the true God (Exodus 19:5-6), through His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), which also assured His intent to bless peoples from all nations (16:19-21; Dan. 7:27).

Israel had been set aside by God to walk holy lives before Him. They were to demonstrate His holiness here on the earth. Israel was actually the firstfruits of God's family. They had “first son status” with God. The firstborn son of each family had to be bought back with silver shekels of redemption. The Levitical tribe took the place of the firstborn son in the work in the temple. God blessed those who blessed Israel, and cursed those who did evil to Israel. They were God's chosen people.

Jeremiah 2:4 "Hear ye the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel:"

The LORD, by the prophet, having observed His great kindness to this people, what they were unto Him, and what regard He had for them, proceeds to scold them for their ingratitude, and requires their attention to what He was about to say; all are called upon, because they were guilty. This concerns the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the several families in them. The ten tribes had been long carried captive.

This message was sent to God's people. It was not for the heathen world. The Israelites are cautioned to listen carefully.

Jeremiah 2:5 "Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?"

What injustice or injury has been done them? There is no unrighteousness in God, nor can any be done by Him. Or what unfaithfulness, or want of truth and integrity in performing promises, had they found in Him? He never suffers His faithfulness to fail, or any of the good things He has promised. So the Targum explains, "what falsehood have your fathers found in my word?" "None at all": God is a covenant keeping God.

"That they are gone far from me": From my fear, as the Chaldee paraphrase; from the word and worship, and ways of God.

"And have walked after vanity": After idols, the vanities of the Gentiles (Jer. 14:22).

"And are become vain?": In their imaginations and in their actions, in their knowledge and in their practice, worshipping idols, as well as guilty of many other sins.

God had made a covenant with the Hebrews through Abraham. God had kept His part of the covenant to the last letter. God is Righteousness, Holiness, and Truth. It is impossible for God to lie.

Hebrews 6:18 "That by two immutable things, in which [it was] impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:"

There was no iniquity in God, so their fathers could not have found iniquity in Him. Vanity causes people to want to please their flesh. This was no different. They pleased their flesh by worshipping things they could see with their physical eyes, or touch with their physical hands. This is committing spiritual adultery.

Verses 6-8: The people's ingratitude moved to idolatry and then to indifference. Hearing God's Word, the people didn't even ask, "Where is the LORD?" (1:6, 8). The priceless heritage of the Promised Land was ignored in favor of idolatry.

Jeremiah 2:6 "Neither said they, Where [is] the LORD that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt?"

They did not ask after Him, nor seek His face and favor, nor worship Him, nor take any notice of the blessings He bestowed upon them.

"That brought us up out of the land of Egypt?": By means of Moses the deliverer, with a mighty hand, and outstretched arm. For, though Moses was the instrument, God was the efficient cause of the deliverance. The favor was His, and the glory of it ought to have been given to Him.

"That led us through the wilderness": Of "Shur", or of "Sin", the desert of Arabia (Exodus 15:22), and a dreadful and terrible one it was.

"Through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death": Where were scorpions, fiery serpents, drought, and no water, and so very dangerous as well as uncomfortable travelling. And yet through all this they were led, and wonderfully supplied and preserved.

"Through a land that no man passed through, and where no man dwelt": There was no passers-by in it, nor inhabitants on it, so there were none to relieve them. Whence it appears, that all their supply, support, and preservation, were from the Lord.

They were not seeking the True God, who did all of these miraculous feats for them. They worshipped whatever was convenient at the time. Look at the list of things God had done for them that would have left no doubt who God is. He parted the Red Sea to save them from Pharaoh's men. He rained Manna from heaven to feed them. He brought water from the Rock to quench their thirst. Their shoes and clothes did not even wear out in 40 years. How could they even consider another? With this True God as their heritage, why would they seek a nothing (idol), who could not help them in any way? The Bible says, Seek and ye shall find. They should seek this God of miracles who is truly God.

Jeremiah 2:7 "And I brought you into a plentiful country, to eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof; but when ye entered, ye defiled my land, and made mine heritage an abomination."

"Into the land of Carmel", as in the Hebrew text. That is, "into the land of Israel, which was planted as Carmel," as the Targum paraphrases it; with wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, and olives. A land flowing with milk and honey (Deut. 8:8).

"To eat the fruit thereof and the goodness thereof": Of vineyards and oliveyards, which they had not planted, and for which they had never labored (Joshua 24:13).

"But when ye entered ye defiled my land": Which the Lord had chosen above all lands, where He would have a temple built for His worship, and where He would cause His Shekinah or glorious Majesty to dwell. But this they defiled by their sins and transgressions, and particularly by their idolatry, as follows:

"And made mine heritage an abomination": By devoting it to the worship of idols, as the Targum paraphrases it.

God brought them into a land of milk and honey. The Promised Land was a fertile land. It was so fertile, one cluster of grapes had to be carried by two men. The land was almost like the Garden of Eden when they took it. Their sin had caused the blessings of God to be removed from them. They inter-married with non-believers and brought idols into their homes.

Jeremiah 2:8 "The priests said not, Where [is] the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the pastors also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after [things that] do not profit."

The prophets whose business it was to draw nigh to God, and offer the sacrifices of the people, and inquire of God for them; whose lips should keep knowledge, and at whose mouth the law should be sought, they being the messengers of the Lord of hosts (Mal. 2:7).

"And they that handle the law knew me not": The Sanhedrin, according to Jarchi; or the lawyers and scribes, the Rabbins (who were known as excellent theologians), and doctors of the law, whose business it was to read and explain it. These did not understand it, nor the mind of God in it; and much less did they know Him in a spiritual and evangelical manner. Or as He is in Christ, and revealed in the Gospel.

"The pastors also transgressed against me": Kings, as the Targum, Jarchi, and Kimchi interpret it, who were pastors or shepherds in a civil sense. Whose business it was to feed the people as the shepherd does his flock. That is, to guide and govern them by wholesome laws, by the laws of God. But instead of this, they rebelled against the Lord and transgressed His commands.

"And the prophets prophesied by Baal": In his name; pretending to be inspired by that idol, and to receive the spirit of prophecy from him.

"And walked after things that do not profit": The gods of the Gentiles which could not supply them with the least temporal blessing, much less give them spiritual and eternal ones (see Jer. 14:22). This is to be understood of false prophets, as Ben Melech.

The priests should have stood up and stopped them. It appears the priests and pastors did not take a stand for God. This is very similar to the compromise that is going on in the church today. The pastors and priests must uphold the Word of God. They must warn the people when there is error in their belief. The priests and pastors must not waver in teaching the Truth. It appears great compromise had entered the church. The worst thing of all, is they listened to the prophets of Baal, a false god. Elijah had shown beyond a shadow of doubt that Baal had no power at all. Baal was powerless to help them. What good could come of worshipping a false god? The answer is none.

Jeremiah 2:9 "Wherefore I will yet plead with you, saith the LORD, and with your children's children will I plead."

The word translated "plead" is often used in legal contexts. Like a plaintiff in a court case, God will bring charges against His wayward people. God is both the offended plaintiff and the divine judge before whom Israel has no defense (compare verses 28-30).

God had given them every opportunity. He had sent prophets and holy men to warn them of this very thing. God has still not given up. He has now sent Jeremiah to plead with them to turn from their wicked ways. This terrible captivity that comes upon them, is actually God pleading with them to repent and come back to Him. God will not quit trying to reach them. Salvation in Jesus was offered to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile.

Romans 1:16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Jeremiah 2:10 "For pass over the isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing."

The "isles of Chittim" indicates the limits of the West, or the Mediterranean world. "Kedar," in the northern Arabian Peninsula, refers to the East. Go where one might, no nation could be found as wicked as Israel who had forsaken the living and true God in exchange for gross idolatry.

"Chittim" represents the lands away from the holy land and "Kedar" represents the Arabs who live around them. The Arabs were descended from Abraham through Ishmael. They were sons of the flesh, not of the Spirit.

Jeremiah 2:11 "Hath a nation changed [their] gods, which [are] yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for [that which] doth not profit."

Israel had been given the privilege of God's glorious presence (Exodus 40:34-38). The people had known God as "their glory", yet other nations had demonstrated greater faithfulness to their "gods, which are yet no gods" (Psalm 115:4).

They are challenged to look at the heathens who worship false gods, and realize the false gods cannot and will not help them. Why would you trade the real God who helps you, for a god that is a nothing that cannot help?

Jeremiah 2:12 "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD."

Meaning either the angels in heaven, or the heavens themselves, by a personification.

"And be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD": All which may be signified by storms and tempests, by thunder and lightning, and by the sun withdrawing its light. This is said to aggravate the wickedness committed, as if the heavens blushed and were ashamed, and were confounded and amazed at it. And as if, on account of it, the Jews deserved not the benefit of the heavens, and the bodies in them.

"Be astonished": is just a way of expressing how ridiculous this would be. The heavens would be astonished and horribly afraid, because the heavens would know the results of such actions. The Jews' desolation would be overwhelming, when God removes His blessings from them.

Jeremiah 2:13 "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, [and] hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

Jeremiah warned that God's people were trying to quench their cravings for salvation and sustenance in the wrong places. They "committed two evils" by turning away from the only true source of "living waters", and by creating "broken cisterns" that could "hold no water", even if living water was available (John 4:14).

"Two evils": First, Israel had abandoned the Lord, the source of spiritual salvation and sustenance (compare 17:8; Psalm 36:9; John 4:14). Second, Israel turned to idolatrous objects of trust; Jeremiah compared these with underground water storage devices for rainwater, which were broken and let water seep out, thus proving useless.

The figure of the "fountain of living waters" emphasizes that God alone can bring life and refreshment necessary to the thirsty soul (compare Psalm 36:9; Isa. 55:1; John 4:10-14; 7:37-39; Rev. 21:6). Israel had left the purity of the living waters for the pollution of contaminated "broken cisterns" that offered no water at all.

The following is a statement made by Jesus about these living waters:

John 7:38 "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."

The children of Israel drank from this living water, when Moses struck the Rock (Jesus), and the water flowed. The living water always proceeds from the throne of God. Israel has abandoned God, who is their very present help. He controls nature, and no other god can furnish wealth, resources or supplies to their people. They have abandoned God and started worshipping things they made with their own hands. This is not only idolatry, but idolatry from those who should know better. These cisterns are things made with human hands and are powerless. The first evil thing they did, was turn away from the living God. The second evil thing they did, was turn to false gods.

Jeremiah 2:14 "[Is] Israel a servant? [is] he a homeborn [slave]? why is he spoiled?"

How is it that a people under God's special care are left at the mercy of an enemy, like a worthless slave?

Israel belonged to the family of God. They were slaves to no man. The only One Israel was to serve was the most high God. They were made slaves to the Babylonians to cause them to repent and turn back to God.

Jeremiah 2:15 "The young lions roared upon him, [and] yelled, and they made his land waste: his cities are burned without inhabitant."

"Young lions": The figure represents invading soldiers that burned cities (compare 4:7), perhaps a reference to the disaster from the Babylonians during Jehoiakim's fourth year, and again 3 years later when he relied on Egypt (compare 20:4; 46:2; 2 Kings 24:1-2).

Satan is like a roaring lion. This is specifically speaking of those who come against Jerusalem, and destroy the city, and take the citizens captive. The "yelling" just lets us know that this was not a silent take-over. It was violent. They burned the cities, and took the people captive. They could not have done this, had God not been angry with Israel and allowed this to happen.

Jeremiah 2:16 "Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of thy head."

"Noph, sometimes called as Moph, a principal city in Egypt (Hosea 9:6), refers to Memphis, the traditional capital of ancient Lower Egypt. "Tahapanes" is usually associated with the Greek Daphne and lay in Egypt's northeastern delta area (compare 43:7; 44:1; 46:14). The fertility of the region may be underscored in the literal Masoretic vowel meaning, which reads "will graze upon thy head". The KJV reading here rests upon a suggested difference in Hebrew meaning. In any case, the message is clear: entanglement with Egypt can only spell defeat for Judah.

Noph and Tahapanes were the two cities in Egypt that stood for the country itself.

This is speaking of two other areas that sided with Babylon against Judah.

Jeremiah 2:17 "Hast thou not procured this unto thyself, in that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, when he led thee by the way?"

Here God, by His prophet, shows that they may thank themselves for all that is hastening upon them (see Num. 32:23).

"In that thou hast forsaken the LORD": Here He shows wherein, (meaning in other words), the Israelites forsook God. Not that He left them, but they left Him, and that without any temptation or provocation. And therefore, were the more inexcusable.

"When he led thee by the way": Viz, by the conduct of His providence in the wilderness, keeping them in safety from all dangers (Exodus 13:21-22; Isa. 63:12-13). Or in the way of His counsels, which the ways of their own carnal wisdom were so opposed unto.

Now we see, they deserve what they get. They brought all of this on themselves, when they turned their backs on God. When God was with them, no one could win a battle against them. God fought their battles for them. They turned away from God toward false gods. This happened to them, because the protection God had around them was now removed. They sinned and now they would pay for it. He had been with them and led them every step they took. His power was shown to them many times, when He destroyed their enemies before them. Now He will not protect them because they have forsaken "the LORD", who was their God.

Jeremiah 2:18 "And now what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river?"

Dependence on alliances with Egypt and Assyria was part of national undoing, a source of shame (verses 36-37).

Making alliances with nations like "Egypt" and "Assyria" in an attempt to thwart judgment at the hands of Babylon would not succeed. To compare these alliances to drinking their rivers reflects how these treaties were like a marriage to these nations (Prov. 5:15-16). The Israelites were trusting in foreigners rather than the Lord as their ultimate source of security. God's presence, represented by the peaceful waters, was Judah's real protection (Psalm 46:4-5).

"Egypt" symbolizes the world. They had chosen the world over God. The water from Egypt or from Assyria, will not give them what they need. The world and its system, will be of no help to them. God is their only help, and they have left Him. They will just have to go into captivity.

Jeremiah Chapter 2 Questions

1. What does the word "moreover" in verse 1 cause you to think?
2. Who was Jeremiah to cry to?
3. What got the Hebrews' attention?

4. Their espousal was to _____.
5. When had they sought God?
6. Israel was _____ unto the LORD.
7. What were the Israelites to demonstrate on the earth?
8. How was the firstborn of each family purchased back from God?
9. God blessed those who _____ Israel.
10. Who does verse 4 tell us this message was for?
11. God is _____, and _____, and _____.
12. What does vanity cause a person to want to do?
13. List some of the miraculous things God had done for them.
14. When God brought them into the fruitful land, what did they do to it?
15. How big was one cluster of grapes in the Promised Land?
16. What should the priest and the pastor have been saying to the people?
17. Instead of listening to God, who had they been listening to?
18. Who had shown this very false god up before?
19. How long will God plead with them?
20. Who had God sent to warn them?
21. What is this terrible captivity that comes upon them, really?
22. What does "Chittim", in verse 10, represent?
23. Who does "Kedar" represent?
24. Why would the heavens be astonished?
25. What were the two evils they had committed?
26. Who controls nature?
27. Who was Israel slave to?
28. Who are the "young lions" in verse 15?

29. Who really brought these problems on them?
30. Why will God not protect them from Babylon?
31. Who does "Egypt" symbolize?