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JEREMIAH 3: 1 "They say, 'If a man puts away his wife, and she goes from him, and become another man's, will he return to her again?' Wouldn't that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the prostitute with many lovers; yet return again to me," says the LORD.

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The first five verses of this chapter allude to the subject of the last; and contain earnest exhortations to repentance, with gracious promises of pardon, notwithstanding every aggravation of guilt, Jer 3:1-5. At the sixth verse a new section of prophecy commences, opening with a complaint against Judah for having exceeded in guilt her sister Israel, already cast off for her idolatry, Jer 3:6-11. She is cast off, but not forever; for to this same Israel, whose place of captivity (Assyria) lay to the north of Judea, pardon is promised on her repentance, together with a restoration to the Church of God, along with her sister Judah, in the latter days, Jer 3:12-20. The prophet foretells the sorrow and repentance of the children of Israel under the Gospel dispensation, Jer 3:21. God renews his gracious promises, Jer 3:22; and they again confess their sins. In this confession their not deigning to name the idol Baal, the source of their calamities, but calling him in the abstract shame, or a thing of shame, is a nice touch of the perusal extremely beautiful and natural, Jer 3:22-25.

#### Verse 1

If a man put away his wife - It was ever understood, by the law and practice of the country, that if a woman were divorced by her husband, and became the wife of another man, the first husband could never take her again. Now Israel had been married unto the Lord; joined in solemn covenant to him to worship and serve him only. Israel turned from following him, and became idolatrous. On this ground, considering idolatry as a spiritual whoredom, and the precept and practice of the law to illustrate this case, Israel could never more be restored to the Divine favor: but God, this first husband, in the plenitude of his mercy, is willing to receive this adulterous spouse, if she will abandon her idolatries and return unto him. And this and the following chapters are spent in affectionate remonstrances and loving exhortations addressed to these sinful people, to make them sensible of their own sin, and God's tender mercy in offering to receive them again into favor.

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JEREMIAH 3: 2 "Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see! Where have you not been lain with? You have sat for them by the ways, as an Arabian in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your prostitution and with your wickedness.

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#### Verse 2

As the Arabian in the wilderness - They were as fully intent on the practice of their idolatry as the Arab in the desert is in lying in wait to plunder the caravans. Where they have not cover to lie in ambush, they scatter themselves about, and run hither and thither, raising themselves up on their saddles to see if they can discover, by smoke, dust, or other token, the approach of any travelers.

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JEREMIAH 3: 3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain; yet you have a prostitute's forehead, you refused to be ashamed.

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## Verse 3

There hath been no latter rain - The former rain, which prepared the earth for tillage, fell in the beginning of November, or a little sooner; and the latter rain fell in the middle of April, after which there was scarcely any rain during the summer.

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JEREMIAH 3: 4 Will you not from this time cry to me, 'My Father, you are the guide of my youth?'

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## Verse 4

Wilt thou not - cry unto me, My father - Wilt thou not allow me to be thy Creator and Preserver, and cease thus to acknowledge idols? See on Jer 2:27 (note).

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JEREMIAH 3: 5 "'Will he retain his anger forever? Will he keep it to the end?' Behold, you have spoken and have done evil things, and have had your way."

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## Verse 5

Will he reserve his anger for ever? - Why should not wrath be continued against thee, as thou continuest transgression against the Lord?

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JEREMIAH 3: 6 Moreover, the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, "Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has played the prostitute.

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## Verse 6

The Lord said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king - This is a new discourse, and is supposed to have been delivered after the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah. Here the prophet shows the people of Judah the transgressions, idolatry, obstinacy, and punishment of their brethren, the ten tribes, whom he calls to return to the Lord, with the most gracious promises of restoration to their own country, their reunion with their brethren of Judah, and every degree of prosperity in consequence. He takes occasion also to show the Jews how much more culpable they were than the Israelites, because they practiced the same iniquities while they had the punishment and ruin of the others before their eyes. He therefore exhorts them to return to God with all their hearts, that they might not fall into the same condemnation. See the following verses.

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JEREMIAH 3: 7 I said after she had done all these things, 'She will return to me;' but she didn't return; and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

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## Verse 7

And I said - By the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Amos, etc.; for all these prophesied to that rebellious people, and exhorted them to return to the Lord.

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JEREMIAH 3: 8 I saw, when, for this very cause that backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorce, yet treacherous Judah, her sister, didn't fear; but she also went and played the prostitute.

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Verse 8

I had put her away - Given them up into the hands of the Assyrians.

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JEREMIAH 3: 9 Because she took her prostitution lightly, the land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with wood.

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Verse 9

The lightness of her whoredom - The grossness of her idolatry: worshipping objects the most degrading, with rites the most impure.

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JEREMIAH 3: 10 Yet for all this her treacherous sister, Judah, has not returned to me with her whole heart, but only in pretence," says the LORD.

JEREMIAH 3: 11 The LORD said to me, "Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.

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Verse 11

Backsliding Israel hath justified herself more - She was less offensive in my eyes, and more excusable, than treacherous Judah. So it is said, Luk 18:14, the humbled publican went down to his house justified rather than the boasting Pharisee. The one was more to be pitied than the other, and more likely to receive the mercy of God.

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JEREMIAH 3: 12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, 'Return, you backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not look in anger on you; for I am merciful,' says the LORD. 'I will not keep anger forever.

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Verse 12

Proclaim these words toward the north - The countries where the ten tribes were then in captivity, Mesopotamia, Assyria, Media, etc., see 2Kgs 17:6; these lay north of Judea. How tender and compassionate are the exhortations in this and the following verses! Could these people believe that

God had sent the prophet and yet prefer the land of their bondage to the blessings of freedom in their own country, and the approbation of their God?

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JEREMIAH 3: 13 Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against the LORD your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and you have not obeyed my voice,' says the LORD."

JEREMIAH 3: 14 "Return, backsliding children," says the LORD; "for I am a husband to you. I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

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#### Verse 14

I will take you one of a city, and two of a family - If there should be but one of a city left, or one willing to return, and two only of a whole tribe, yet will I receive these, and bring them back from captivity into their own land. I have heard these words most sinfully applied to show the nature of a fancied eternal decree of election, that has appointed in several cases one only out of a whole city, and two out of a whole family, to be eternally saved, leaving the rest, according to the decree of reprobation, to perish everlastingly! And yet these persons, who spoke thus of the Fountain of eternal goodness and mercy, professed to believe in Him who by the grace of God tasted death for every man.

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JEREMIAH 3: 15 I will give you shepherds according to my heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

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#### Verse 15

I will give you pastors according to mine heart - The pastor means either the king or the prophet; and the pastors here promised may be either kings or prophets, or both. These shall be according to God's own heart; they shall be of his own choosing and shall be qualified by himself: and in consequence they shall feed the people with knowledge, דעה דעה that Divine truth concerning the true God and the best interests of man, which was essentially necessary to their salvation; and understanding השכיל haskeil, the full interpretation of every point, that in receiving the truth they might become wise, holy, and happy.

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JEREMIAH 3: 16 It shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land, in those days," says 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 miss it; neither shall it be made any more.

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#### Verse 16

The ark of the covenant of the Lord - This symbol of the Divine presence, given to the Jews as a token and pledge of God's dwelling among them, shall be no longer necessary, and shall no longer

exist; for in the days of the Messiah, to which this promise seems to relate, God's worship shall not be confined either to one place or to one people. The temple of God shall be among men, and every where God be adored through Christ Jesus.

Neither shall that be done any more - The ark shall be no more established, nor carried from place to place, nor shall men go to visit it. All its ceremonies and importance shall cease; and, if lost, shall never be rebuilt.

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JEREMIAH 3: 17 At that time they shall call Jerusalem 'The throne of the LORD;' and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the LORD's name, to Jerusalem. Neither shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.

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Verse 17

They shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord - The new Jerusalem, the universal Church of Christ, shall be God's throne: and wherever he is acknowledged as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, there God sits on his throne, and holds his court.

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JEREMIAH 3: 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 gave for an inheritance to your fathers.

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Verse 18

The house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel - That is, in those days in which the Jews shall be brought in with the fullness of the Gentiles.

Out of the land of the north - From Chaldea. This prophecy has two aspects: one refers to the return from the Babylonish captivity; the other, to the glorious days of Christianity. But the words may refer to that gathering together of the Jews, not only from Chaldea, but from the countries of their dispersion over the face of the whole earth, and uniting them in the Christian Church.

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JEREMIAH 3: 19 "But I said, 'How I would put you among the children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the armies of the nations!' and I said, 'You shall call me "My Father", and shall not turn away from following me.'

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Verse 19

How shalt I put thee among the children - As if he had said, How can ye be accounted a holy seed, who are polluted? How can ye be united to the people of God, who walk in the path of sinners? How can ye be taken to heaven, who are unholy within, and unrighteous without?

And I said, Thou shalt call me, My father - This is the answer to the above question. They could not be put among the children unless they became legal members of the heavenly family: and they could not become members of this family unless they abandoned idolatry, and took the Lord for

their portion. Nor could they be continued in the privileges of the heavenly family, unless they no more turned away from their heavenly Father.

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JEREMIAH 3: 20 "Surely as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so you have dealt treacherously with me, house of Israel," says the LORD.

JEREMIAH 3: 21 A voice is heard on the bare heights, the weeping and the petitions of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten the LORD their God.

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#### Verse 21

A voice was heard upon the high places - Here the Israelites are represented as assembled together to bewail their idolatry and to implore mercy. While thus engaged, they hear the gracious call of Jehovah: -

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JEREMIAH 3: 22 Return, you backsliding children, I will heal your backsliding. "Behold, we have come to you; for you are the LORD our God.

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#### Verse 22

Return, ye backsliding children - This they gladly receive, and with one voice make their confession to him: "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art Jehovah our God;" and thence to the end of the chapter, show the reasons why they return unto God.

1. Because he is the true God.
  2. Because the idols did not profit them: they could give no help in time of trouble.
  3. Because it is the prerogative of God alone to give salvation.
  4. Because they had no kind of prosperity since they had abandoned the worship of their Maker. And this was not only their case, but it was the case of their forefathers, who all suffered in consequence of their idolatry and disobedience.
  5. These reasons are concluded with a hearty confession of sin, at the thought of which they are confounded; for the remembrance of their sin was grievous to them, and the burden was intolerable. This confession ended, God appears in the next chapter with gracious promises, and proper directions how they are to return, and how to conduct themselves in future.
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JEREMIAH 3: 23 Truly in vain is help from the hills, the tumult on the mountains. Truly the salvation of Israel is in the LORD our God.

JEREMIAH 3: 24 But the shameful thing has devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.

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Verse 24

For shame hath devoured - The word shame, here and in Jer 11:13; Hos 9:10, is supposed to signify Baal, the idol which they worshipped. That thing or shame which has brought you into contempt, confusion, and ruin. Sooner or later every sinner must be ashamed of his conduct; next, confounded; and, lastly, ruined by it, unless by true faith and hearty repentance he returns to the Lord.

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JEREMIAH 3: 25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our confusion cover us; for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day. We have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”

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