

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Jeremiah Chapters 3-4

10/15/14

Bible Study Notes - Chapter 3

Verses 1-5

1 "If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers - would you now return to me?" declares the LORD. 2 "Look up to the barren heights and see. Is there any place where you have not been ravished? By the roadside you sat waiting for lovers, sat like a nomad in the desert. You have defiled the land with your prostitution and wickedness. 3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen. Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you refuse to blush with shame. 4 Have you not just called to me: 'My Father, my friend from my youth, 5 will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue forever?' This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can."

3:1 This law, found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, says that a divorced woman who remarries can never be reunited with her first husband. Judah "divorced" God and "married" other gods. God had every right to permanently disown his wayward people, but in his mercy he was willing to take them back again. "Like a nomad in the desert" means that Judah anticipated idolatry as a thief might hide in the wilderness to plunder a passing caravan.

3:2-3 The words polluted, prostitution, and wickedness reveal a serious problem that had gradually spread until it affected everything. In this situation, even nature had been affected with a drought, which God permitted to bring the people to their senses. Sin brings drastic consequences once it gains a foothold in our lives. Lies lead to more lies and hatred to more hatred. Jeremiah reminded his people repeatedly that sin must not go on unchecked.

3:4-5 In spite of their great sin, the people of Israel continued to talk like they were God's children. The only way they could do this was to minimize their sin. When we know we've done something wrong, we want to downplay the error and relieve some of the guilt we feel. As we minimize our sinfulness, we naturally shy away from making changes, and so we keep on sinning. But if we view every wrong attitude and action as a serious offense against God, we will begin to understand what living for God is all about. Is there any sin in your life that you've written off as too small to worry about? God says that we must confess and turn away from every sin.

Unfaithful Israel - Verses 6-25

6 During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, "Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there. 7 I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it. 8 I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery. 9 Because Israel's immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood. 10 In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense," declares the LORD. 11 The LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. 12 Go, proclaim this message toward the north: " 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever. 13 Only acknowledge

your guilt-- you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,' " declares the LORD. 14"Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, "for I am your husband. I will choose you--one from a town and two from a clan--and bring you to Zion. 15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. 16 In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "men will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. 17 At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. 18 In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance. 19 "I myself said, " 'How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.' I thought you would call me 'Father' and not turn away from following me. 20 But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. 21 A cry is heard on the barren heights, the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel, because they have perverted their ways and have forgotten the LORD their God. 22 "Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." "Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God. 23 Surely the [idolatrous] commotion on the hills and mountains is a deception; surely in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. 24 From our youth shameful gods have consumed the fruits of our fathers' labor--their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters. 25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our disgrace cover us. We have sinned against the LORD our God, both we and our fathers; from our youth till this day we have not obeyed the LORD our God."

3:6-6:25 The northern kingdom, Israel, had fallen to Assyria, and its people had been taken into captivity. The tragic lesson of their fall should have caused the southern kingdom, Judah, to return to God, but Judah paid no attention. Jeremiah urged Judah to return to God to avoid certain disaster. This message came between 627 and 621 B.C., during Josiah's reign. Although Josiah obeyed God's commands, his example apparently did not penetrate the hearts of the people. If the people refused to repent, God said he would destroy the nation because of the evils of Josiah's grandfather, King Manasseh (2 Kings 23:25-27).

3:11-13 Israel was not even trying to look as if it were obeying God, but Judah maintained the appearance of faith, though without true heartfelt commitment. Believing the right doctrines without genuine commitment to God is like offering sacrifices without true repentance. Judah's false repentance brought Jeremiah's words of condemnation. To live without faith is hopeless; to express sorrow without change is hypocritical and unfaithful. Being just sorry for sin is not enough. Repentance demands a change of mind and heart that results in changed behavior.

3:12-18 The northern kingdom, Israel, was in captivity, being punished for its sins. The people of Judah undoubtedly looked down on these northern neighbors for their blatant heresy and degraded morals. Even so, Jeremiah promised the remnant of Israel God's blessings if they would turn to him. Judah, still secure in its own mind, should have turned to God after seeing the destruction of Israel. But the people of Judah refused, so Jeremiah startled them by reaffirming God's promise to Israel's remnant if they would repent.

3:15 God promised to give his people leaders who would follow him, filled with knowledge (wisdom) and understanding. God saw Israel's lack of direction, so he promised to provide the right kind of leadership. We look to and trust our leaders for guidance and direction. But if they do not follow God, they will lead us astray. Pray for God-honoring leaders in our nations, communities, and churches—those who will be good examples and bring us God's wisdom.

3:16-17 During the reigns of David and Solomon over a united Israel, the people had a beautiful temple, where they worshiped God. The temple housed the ark of the covenant, the symbol of God's presence with the people. The ark held the tablets of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 25:10-22). Those days with the

ark wouldn't be missed in the future Kingdom because God's presence by the Holy Spirit would be there personally among his people.

3:22-25 Jeremiah predicted a day when the nation would be reunited, true worship would be reinstated, and sin would be seen for what it is. Our world glorifies the thrill that comes from wealth, competition, and sexual pleasure, and it ignores the sin that is so often associated with these thrills. It is sad that so few see sin as it really is—a deception. Most people can't see this until they are destroyed by the sin they pursue. The advantage of believing God's Word is that we don't have to learn by hard experience the destructive results of sin.

Bible Study Notes - Chapter 4

Verses 1-4

1 "If you will return, O Israel, return to me," declares the LORD. "If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, 2 and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the LORD lives,' then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory." 3 This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: "Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns. 4 Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done-- burn with no one to quench it.

4:1-2 Throughout the Old Testament, God consistently revealed his intentions to bless the nations of the world. His global vision included a central role for the people of Israel as the channel through which God would pour out his blessings on all nations. But their privilege as the chosen people was in jeopardy as long as they insisted on disobedience and idolatry.

4:3 Jeremiah told the people to break up the hardness of their hearts as a plow breaks up unplowed ground—soil that has not been tilled for a season. Good kings like Josiah had tried to turn the people back to God, but the people had continued to worship their idols in secret. Their hearts had become hardened to God's will. Unless their hearts were broken and cleaned up, the good seed of God's commands could not take root. Old habits and hidden sins had to be uprooted and rejected. Likewise we must remove our heart-hardening sin if we expect God's Word to take root and grow in our lives.

Disaster From The North - Verses 5-31

5 "Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: 'Sound the trumpet throughout the land! Cry aloud and say: 'Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities!' 6 Raise the signal to go to Zion! Flee for safety without delay! For I am bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction." 7 A lion has come out of his lair; a destroyer of nations has set out. He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant. 8 So put on sackcloth, lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned away from us. 9 "In that day," declares the LORD, "the king and the officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled." 10 Then I said, "Ah, Sovereign LORD, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, 'You will have peace,' when the sword is at our throats." 11 At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, "A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; 12 a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them." 13 Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined! 14 O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts? 15 A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim. 16 "Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: 'A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah. 17 They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me,' " declares the LORD. 18 "Your own conduct and actions have brought this

upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart!" 19 Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry. 20 Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins. In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment. 21 How long must I see the battle standard and hear the sound of the trumpet? 22 "My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good." 23 I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone. 24 I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying. 25 I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away. 26 I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger. 27 This is what the LORD says: "The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely. 28 Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back." 29 At the sound of horsemen and archers every town takes to flight. Some go into the thickets; some climb up among the rocks. All the towns are deserted; no one lives in them. 30 What are you doing, O devastated one? Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life. 31 I hear a cry as of a woman in labor, a groan as of one bearing her first child-- the cry of the Daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands and saying, "Alas! I am fainting; my life is given over to murderers."

4:6-7 The destruction from the north would come from Babylon when Nabopolassar and his son, Nebuchadnezzar II, attacked (see 2 Chronicles 36).

4:10 Jeremiah, deeply moved by God's words, expressed his sorrow and confusion to God. Jeremiah was intercessor for the people. These people had false expectations because of the past promises of blessings, their blindness to their own sin, and the false prophets who kept telling them that all was well.

4:15 Disaster was announced first from Dan and then on to the hills of Ephraim because Dan was located at the northern border of Israel. Thus, the Danites would be the first to see the approaching armies as they invaded from the north. No one would be able to stop the armies because they would be coming as punishment for the people's sin.

4:19-31 Jeremiah was anguished by the sure devastation of the coming judgment. This judgment would continue until the people turned from their sin and listened to God. Although this prophecy refers to the future destruction by Babylon, it could also describe the judgment of all sinners at the end of the world. These verses also speak to those in an age of terrorism about overwhelming feelings of dread and the importance of recognizing God's ultimate control over the events of history.

4:22 Judah was skilled in doing wrong but did not know how to do what was right. Right living is more than simply avoiding sin. It requires decision and discipline. We must develop skills in right living because our behavior attracts attention to our God. We should pursue excellence in Christian living with as much effort as we pursue excellence at work.

4:27 God warned that destruction was certain, but he promised that the faithful remnant would be spared. God is committed to preserving those who are faithful to him.