

Jeremiah 2 • My people have forgotten Me!

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And it's kind of challenging, you know, going through a book like Jeremiah, because it's kind of like a long, like 52-chapter intervention, and those are never fun. You know, confrontational sorts of things are never a whole lot of fun, but that's largely what's kind of going on, and particularly in this chapter. You're going to see as we go through chapter 2 here, that this is filled with questions from the Lord to God's people, the Jews. But in and amidst all of those questions, you're going to notice in this chapter that the Lord is going to use several word pictures to help them understand the gravity of their waywardness, He's going to illustrate it several different ways through this chapter. And the first one that he uses is a particularly painful one for some people, because in verses 1 through 8, the Lord is going to use the language that is typically spoken concerning a husband and a wife when unfaithfulness enters into the equation.

And I know that many, many couples have dealt with the pain of unfaithfulness, and I know that it's a very painful thing, and it's painful for God too. And the reason the Lord uses this illustration is because it is very poignant, it is very touching to our hearts, and it helps us to understand how God sees the spiritual adultery that happens when His people stray from Him. And this goes like this in these first eight verses. It says, *“¹The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ²‘Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem,...’ (ESV)*

And I want to pause there, just long enough to remind you that in our first study, we brought out the fact that Jeremiah was from the small village of Anathoth, which is only about 3 miles away from Jerusalem as it was located then. But you can see here, that the Lord is telling him to go to Jerusalem to proclaim this message there. And here it is. *“²...Thus says the LORD. (He goes on) ‘I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.’”* And he's talking about those early days of the relationship between God and the people of Israel, even how they followed Him in the wilderness. He refers to it as *“a land not sown.”* That's because you couldn't grow anything in the wilderness. There's no food that's going to come from that land. It's not going to generate anything to keep you alive. And yet, God kept them alive and they followed the Lord in that dry and barren place.

And now, that God has brought them into a fruitful land, a place that as He even says, was flowing with milk and honey, that's when they turn away.

But He goes on to speak of those earlier times in verse 3, He says, "*Israel was holy to the LORD, (in other words, set apart) the firstfruits of his harvest.*" Now, that's an interesting statement; Israel was the firstfruits of God's harvest. God wanted to harvest the nations, Israel was to be the firstfruits, and they were to be a tool that God used to reach the nations but they never attained to that ministry at all! They fell into idolatry and then later fell into legalism. And they never functioned in the role for which God intended. So, He says that they were holy and they were the firstfruits of His harvest.

And look what He goes on to say there, in verse three, He says, "*All who ate of it (and it's speaking of the harvest of the Lord, and what He's talking about there is all who came and partook of Israel in a negative sort of a way. In fact, if you have an NIV on your lap, your Bible says, "All who devoured her..." and that's really, the meaning of the phrase. He says, "All who devoured her" or ate of it) incurred guilt; disaster came upon them, declares the LORD.*"

And what the Lord is saying here is, in those early days, He's reminding them, "God protected you, God took care of you, the Lord was with you. He defended you in all of your ways, if anyone came and attacked you, they paid for it." And He's reminding them of the way it was early on in their relationship. It's obviously not that way now. And now, in verse 4, He begins to ask a series of questions that are going to take us through, really, the whole chapter. In verse four, he says, "*Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. ⁵Thus says the LORD: 'What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, (and, in fact, He says) and became worthless?'*" Stop there for just a moment.

The Lord is asking a very important question here. He's saying, what was it that you saw in Me that was bad? How did I wrong you? What did I do to offend you? How did I act, in any way, that would have driven you away from My love and My protection, and so forth?

And what the Lord is doing here by asking this question, is something that we often have to do at a time when we're having an intervention. We have to introduce reason, and that's what the Lord is doing, He's introducing reason. He's saying, come, like He just did through Isaiah, come, let us reason together, let us reason this thing through. Let's talk about this. Let me ask you a question, how did I wrong you? What did I do that drove you away?

And the reason that the Lord is doing this, the reason this approach is being used, is because unfaithfulness is devoid of reason. Are you with me? There's no reason in unfaithfulness, reason never enters the picture. It is a by-product of pure emotion, it is a by-product of lust with a healthy dose of stupidity mixed in there for good measure. And so, you have all those things making up the reason or the cause of our unfaithfulness, but reason doesn't enter into the picture.

If we allowed reason to really, truly enter our hearts, we wouldn't enter into those places of sin and unfaithfulness. I mean, think about the people who have been unfaithful in their marriage relationships and then, had to endure the incredible heartache, the incredible fallout that comes as a result. If they had allowed reason to influence their hearts, and if they could be given the ability to look beyond their actions and see the consequences, I dare say they wouldn't have gone there. So, the Lord is injecting reason into the conversation.

Verse 6, He says, *“They did not say, ‘Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?’”* And what the Lord is saying is, “They never sought Me. I'm the One who brought them through the wilderness. Now they're in a land of promise, going through hard times, but they never sought Me.” They never sought and said, “Where's the Lord? Now, we need to go to Him, we need to return to the Lord!” They didn't do that.

Verse 7, He says, *“And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.”* I want you to stop there for a moment. How did Israel do that? Well, they did it by mimicking the worship practices of their pagan neighbors. Literally adopting the way of life, the way of worship, the way of living that their pagan neighbors were doing, the things that they ran after.

And I think about that, I think about the church today. I think about how this applies to the body of Christ, and I have to ask myself the question; first of all, what are the worship practices of the world? They might say, “Well, I'm not religious.” It doesn't matter what they say, they worship. They worship something or someone. You can't get around it. People like to say they're not religious or “I don't worship anything,” and they do too. They do too, they just don't know it. They may not see it or they're not willing to admit it. Everybody worships something or someone!

So, you look at the world and you say, “What do they worship?” Power, lust, pleasure, wealth, right? All those things; Excitement. So, I have to ask the

question, have we in the body of Christ adopted anything from the world and brought it or tried to bring it into the church? Have we done that? I think we have. Over the years we look at our history and you can see that we have, we've adopted the ways of the world, just like Israel adopted the ways of their pagan neighbors.

And sometimes, we even christen them, meaning that we take something that is very worldly like wealth, the love and the running after of wealth, and we christen it, and we say, God wants you wealthy. And it's ludicrous. Sure, God blesses people, but we've taken the lust for wealth, and we've made it part of our Christian doctrine. We've made it even part of the covenant of the cross!

And it's just nothing more than adopting the ways of the world, and it can affect the leadership. Look at verse 8, it did in Israel. He says, "*The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' (Even the priest didn't seek God in the midst of their difficulties. He says) Those who handle the law (that's for you and I those who handled the Word. He says) did not know me; the shepherds (that's the pastors) transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.*"

Well, you can see here, can't you? The Lord is painting this picture of the apostasy of Israel. The fact that they abandoned the things of the Lord, which were worthwhile, and they ran after things that were worthless instead, that provided no blessing in the end. By the way, why do people do that? I mean, if we're going to inject reason into the conversation, let's ask that question. Why do people run after things that don't last? That have no lasting value? Or that are in fact, worthless? Why do they do it?

I mean, think about drug abuse, think about somebody doing cocaine or something like that. Why? Why would someone do that? It's the same reason that Israel did what they did, for momentary gratification and pleasure. It's an instant, that there's this momentary high, and then after that you're enslaved, you're in bondage. And so, they were willing to sell their freedom for a moment of pleasure, and they became slaves.

Verse 9, He says, "*Therefore I still contend with you, (If you have a New King James Version, your Bible says, "Therefore, I will yet bring charges against you", says the LORD" or) declares the LORD, and with your children's children I will contend.*" And then comes the challenge, an interesting challenge, He says, "¹⁰*For cross to the coasts of Cyprus (Do you remember the island of Cyprus?) and (go) see, (He says, "Go check it out") or send to Kedar (And that's the northern Arabian desert tribes He's referring to there. And here's the*

challenge) and examine with care; See if there has (ever) been such a thing? Has a nation (ever) changed its gods, even though they are no gods?'"

What's God doing here? He says, go to Cyprus, go over to Kidar, go ask, go do a little investigation. Find out if any nation has ever abandoned their gods. No, they're not! They're faithful to their gods, and their gods aren't even gods! And yet they're faithful to him. You, Israel, worship the living God, and you have abandoned Me! And you have replaced Me for gods that are not gods. God is asking them to go and investigate because it's never happened before, it's never happened before.

Look what He goes on to say there, at the end of verse 11, "*But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit* (or does not do them any good)." Isn't that something? They've exchanged their glory. And that's what happens, really, every time we choose sin over obedience and devotion to the Lord, isn't it? We exchange something good for something that isn't going to benefit. We do it, and we've done it. I've done it, I've done it lots of times by choosing to disobey my Heavenly Father. And I've done the exact same thing that Israel did.

So, what's God's reaction when we do that? When we take what is good and we turn our back to it and we run after something that is not good, what is His response? Look at verse 12, "*Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, (And then He goes on to explain why) ¹³for my people have committed two evils:*" And this is where He now goes on to introduce a new picture of unfaithfulness. He says, first of all, "*they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters,*" Now He's using a metaphor of the life that He brings to Israel as a fountain of living waters. And He says, look what they've done. "*(They)...hewed out cisterns for themselves, (in fact) broken cisterns that can hold no water.*" This is crazy. So, here the Lord charges His people with abandoning the life-giving waters of His presence in their lives and instead carving out for themselves broken cisterns.

And for those of you that don't know what a cistern is, it's essentially, well, in Bible times, it was a big area that was carved into the rock that would essentially collect rainwater. It was just a kind of a reservoir. And since it wasn't running water, it was just stagnant. It usually went bad pretty quickly. And water in a cistern tasted awful and if the rains of course didn't fall, your cistern wasn't going to get filled up at all. And so that's an issue. And then what often happened too, is that when there would be shiftings in the ground, and so forth, these cisterns would crack and the water would all drain out. So, you go to get

some water out of your cistern and you find that it's empty because it developed cracks in the ground, and it all drained away.

And so, the Lord, and that's why the Lord says there, at the end of verse 13, He says, “...*they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.*” You know, Israel is actually known for its natural springs, which produce water very dependably and it's clear and cool. But a broken cistern can't even begin to compare to a natural spring in the areas of reliability or quality of the water, and yet God says, the people chose that over a spring of water.

Once again, we're asking questions, why would you do that? Why would you choose water out of a cistern that quickly becomes stagnant, smelly, and tastes awful, over a perpetual spring of water that is cool, and refreshing, and reliable? Why? And God is just as incredulous over this whole thing as you and I, as we're kind of talking about this.

Verse 14 through 19, the Lord is going to create yet another picture of unfaithfulness, but He's going to deal with it from the standpoint of slavery, because that's what we've already mentioned unfaithfulness produces.

God begins by asking in verse 14, “*Is Israel a slave?*” “Did I make him a slave? Did I create him to be enslaved? Did I call him to be a slave?” God's asking questions here, and He's looking for answers. Oh, now, wait a minute, did I go through and I deal with the history of Israel? God called them out of slavery! That's what He did, He called them into freedom. Isn't that just what the Lord does in our lives? Doesn't the Lord call us out of slavery and into the freedom of His presence? Notice He goes on to ask another question, “*Is he (and He's talking about Israel now.) a homeborn servant?* (In other words, is he the offspring of a slave? Again, the answer is no. And so, the question is) *Why then has he become a prey?*” Why? If he's a free man, why has he become prey? And we're forcing, again, reason into the conversation. So, why are the neighboring nations conquering you over and over again? Why are they just coming in whenever they want?

You guys read the book of Judges, I trust. It's just this repetition of the unfaithfulness of Israel and the neighboring nations making their way into Israel to rape the land. So, God's asking why? If he was called to be free, why is he a slave? Notice He goes on in verse 15, He says, “*The lions have roared against him; (and) they have roared loudly. They have made his land a waste; his cities are in ruins, without inhabitant.* ¹⁶*Moreover, the men of Memphis and Tahpanhes* (And those are cities in Egypt. Look at this, this is an interesting

picture) *have shaved the crown of your head.*''' That's interesting. He's using the crown of the head as kind of a picture of the fact that, I crowned you, I crowned you with glory, God says.

How did God crown Israel with glory? They were the only nation on the face of the earth to whom God revealed Himself in the way that He did through His law. The only nation. He's basically saying, I crowned you with glory but you keep going back to the Egyptians, you keep going back there. And the Egyptians, all they get around to doing is removing the crown that God put there, because you're turning to them for help instead of the Lord, your God!

Remember something, guys, Egypt is a picture of the world. Pharaoh is a picture of Satan. Moses in the situation of the Exodus, is a picture of Christ. And the deliverance from Egypt is a picture of our own deliverance from our bondage to sin, into the freedom that we have in Christ. There are beautiful pictures there.

So, here's the question we have to ask ourselves as the church, do we ever go back to the world? Do we do what Israel did? Do we go back to Egypt and have our crown taken away, the glory of what God has intended for our lives? Instead of turning to the Lord, do we turn to the world? Do we go to the world for answers? Do we mimic the world in the things that they do, the ways that they do it?

Yes, I believe that we do. And this whole discussion calls into mind something the Apostle Paul wrote in the book of Galatians. Let me show this on the screen to you, I've made reference to this verse many times. Paul writes in Galatians 5:1,

Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

He says, don't go back. I set you free to be free. That's what Paul's saying, the Lord set you free to be free. Don't go back in the world. You and I were slaves, we were slaves to our base lusts and desires. We were in slavery to the flesh. Jesus came and set us free from that. Through the power of His spirit.

And now, He says, as you walk out this life, depend on Me. Look to Me, come to Me, ask Me for the things that you need. Don't go to the world. We live in the world, I know that, I get that, but we don't rely on the world. We don't look to the world. We don't trust in the world. When we do, we slip back into slavery.

And that's something we have to be very careful about. Just as we see in this example, the Lord speaking to His people. Verse 17, look with me in your Bible, “*Have you not brought this upon yourself by forsaking the LORD, your God, when he led you in the way? ¹⁸And now what do you gain by going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile?*”

Of course, that's a picture of looking to Egypt for help. “*Or (He says, at the end of verse 18) Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates?*” Again, a picture of turning to them for help. They wouldn't turn to the Lord. Why wouldn't they turn to the Lord? Why? Why wouldn't they turn to the Lord?

Why do we turn to the world instead of turning to the Lord? Verse 19, He says, “*Your evil will chastise you, and your own apostasy will reprove you. (And then, check out this statement) Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God;*” That's a powerful section of that verse. “*It is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD, your God.*”

And I believe that's just the same today as it was back then. It is an evil thing for the people of God to forsake the wellspring of life and turn to the broken-down sources of the world. The world is bankrupt, and we have to come to that conclusion and we have to understand that the world is bankrupt. We don't go there. They have bankrupt ideas, bankrupt ways.

He goes on to say, I'm still in verse 19, “*the fear of me is not in you, declares the Lord God of hosts. ²⁰For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; (He's talking about how He set them free from their bondage and slavery in Egypt.) but you said, 'I will not serve.'*” In other words, the response of the people, even after they'd been set free from their bondage of slavery, was, I will not serve.

In other words, you know, they responded to the love of the Lord by refusing to serve the Lord. He says, “*Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore.*” And, this is graphic, but now we're bringing in the picture of unfaithfulness, the level of a prostitute. And prostitution is a very common graphic image that is used in the Old Testament, frankly, to speak of unfaithfulness, the unfaithfulness of God's people because it is spiritual adultery. And physical adultery and spiritual adultery produce this similar picture that God's trying to convey, and if it's offensive to us tonight, it ought to be.

I think it needs to be, we need to understand the gravity of the offense and how offensive this thing is to God, how repugnant it is to the Lord, but also what moved Him to send His only Son to bear on the cross what we had done, you know. Verse 21, we're going to change the picture again and now to a wild vine, He says in verse 21, He says, “*‘Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?’*” God says, I planted good stuff, good seed, reliable. And I was hoping to gain a harvest from you as a nation, but you became wild and unfruitful, and you bore only bad fruit. Verse 22, this is an important verse, “*‘Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord GOD.’*”

And this is another picture that God is using to help them to see the gravity of their sin. And He's using the picture of filth that can't be cleansed away. Basically, what He's saying is, there's no amount of good works or the keeping of religious ceremonies that's going to counteract what you've done here. You can't offset the conviction of sin by trying to be a good person.

We do that though, even as Christians, don't we? We get convicted of our sin; I need to get back to church. Man, I need to get back to church. I need to start reading my Bible. I got to start praying more. And that's fine if those things are being done to strengthen you not to sin, but too many times we're just trying to tip the scales. We're trying to offset the damage that we've done by doing some good and God is saying, you can't do that. You can't wash yourself. You can't cleanse yourself. You want to be cleansed from your sin? It's going to come through confessing, turning from that sin, and returning to the Lord. That's how you get cleansing. Not by trying to work it off, by trying to do good things.

Look at verse 23, “*‘How can you say’ ‘I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals’?. Look at your way in the valley; (Or, as the NIV says, “See how you behaved in the valley) know what you have done-”* And then, in the middle of the verse, the Lord uses the picture of an animal wandering around in heat. So, you can see that the thing is kind of, you know, deteriorating. He refers to Israel as “*a restless young camel running here and there, (or) a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves; in her month they will find her. (In other words, at mating time she'll be there.)*”²⁵ *Keep your feet from going unshod and your throat from thirst. But you said, ‘It is hopeless, for I have loved foreigners, and after them I will go.’*”

And this is Israel kind of admitting, even though she's been warned, even though the Lord has counseled His people not to run after the pagan lovers. She

responded by saying, "It's no use, I have to do it." Verse 26, "*As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: (Speaking of the judgment to come) they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' and to a stone, 'You gave me birth.'* (Speaking of how they used wood and stone to carve their idols, images of pagan gods. He says) *'For they have turned their back to me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble, they say, 'Arise and save us!''*"

Don't you find out that's so often the case with people? Running after the world, running after the things of the world, and then the bottom falls out. And what do they do? Oh, God! I turn to you! Lord, save me! You know, and the graciousness and mercy of God is such that if their heart is genuine, He will, He will. He will turn to them.

But I want you to notice the challenge that the Lord gives to Israel here in verse 28. He says, "*But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah.*" And that just means they've completely fallen into classic paganism, with a god for everything. God says to them, though, so let your gods come and rescue you. Let them come to your aid. If they're worthy of your time and your love, well certainly they'll help you in your time of trouble.

So, He says in verse 29, "*Why do you contend with me? (Or, as the New King James Version says, 'Why will you plead with me?') You have all transgressed against me, declares the LORD. ³⁰In vain have I struck your children; they took no correction; (Meaning they didn't learn anything. They've been disciplined by the Lord, and they didn't learn a thing.) your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravaging lion. (That speaks of how Israel treated the prophets that the Lord sent to warn them; they met them with violence and murder.) And you, O generation, behold the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, 'We are free, we will come no more to you?' (Speaking of the pride of believing they had no need to confess their sin, to come to the Lord, to return to Him.) Can a virgin forget her ornaments? or a bride her attire? (And then, this is the amazing thing) Yet my people have forgotten me days without number.'*"

And the questions that He's asking there, in verse 32, "*'Can a virgin forget her ornaments? or bride her attire?'*" It's meant to underscore how the rejection of Israel is an unnatural thing. I mean, questions like that are asked throughout the scripture to try to highlight an unnatural situation. Can a mother forget her baby? Things like that. It would be unnatural for such a thing to happen. And yet, He says, you've forgotten. You've forgotten me. And it's an unnatural thing.

“³³How well you direct your course to seek love! So that even to the wicked women you have taught your ways. (And when the Lord talks about seeking love, He's talking here about the spiritual adultery that they are engaging in.)

³⁴Also on your skirts is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor; you did not find them breaking in. Yet in spite of all these things you say, 'I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.' Behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned.'”

And this is a very important point, and I believe that God still feels the same way about this today as He did then. He says, *“I will bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned.'”* The testimony of the Scriptures is that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, right? That's God's testimony. When we say, I don't believe the Bible, or I don't believe the Bible is true. What I believe is...and then we go off and ramble off our own thing. We're essentially saying, I don't believe what God said. And God is saying to Israel, same thing, He's saying today I'm going to bring you to judgment for saying that because what you're saying in essence is I have not sinned. John the apostle wrote of the same danger. Look on the screen from 1 John, verse 10 of chapter 1. He says,

1 John 1:10 (ESV)

If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

We make Him a liar because that's His testimony. So, if we say we've not sinned we're the liars. And He ends the chapter here, in these last couple of verses, by saying, *“³⁶How much you go about, changing your way! (That fickle, changing, double mindedness that happens when people have gone astray. He says) You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria. ³⁷From it too you will come away with your hands on your head, for the LORD has rejected those in whom you trust, and you will not prosper by them.’”*

We, you're never going to prosper by turning to the ways of the world. It's just not going to happen. There's no, you're not going to prosper that direction. God says I won't let it happen.