

## August 30

**Scriptures:** Read Jeremiah 3 & 4

**Key Verse:** “O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved...”  
(Jeremiah 4:14)

### Overview

According to the Mosaic law, it was impossible for a divorced wife to return again to her first husband if she had remarried another, for such would be considered adultery which defiles the land (cf. Deut. 24:1-4; Lev. 18:25, 27). Judah is pictured as the wife of the Lord who had left him and “lived as a prostitute with many lovers” (3:1; NIV), committing spiritual adultery and harlotry by joining herself with many heathen gods (made from merely “stones and trees”, 3:9). The point that Jeremiah makes is that it is not a simple matter for Judah, who has sinned so deeply against God, to think that she can easily return to Him, her first love. Therefore, Jeremiah clearly exposes Judah’s sins so that she might feel the guilt, shame, and remorse, for true repentance can come only after one realizes the gravity of his sin, and his conscience and heart convict him. After chastisement and rebuke (God withheld rain, 3:3;14:1-6), she speaks sweet words to the Lord and asks Him not to be angry with her any longer, but these are just words that do not come from the heart (3:5).

Judah’s “sister”, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, had openly abandoned the Lord about 300 years earlier (cf. 1 Kings 12:27-28) and had been “divorced” and suffered His judgment of destruction and captivity by the Assyrians (2 Kings 17:23). Therefore, Judah had looked upon her with scorn, thinking herself much better than Israel. The apparent godliness of the people of Judah was only because of the reforms that godly King Josiah enforced (2 Kings 23); yet the people’s hearts were far from God. Therefore, Jeremiah predicts that Judah would suffer the same fate as Israel (cf. 2 Kings 23:27) and boldly accuses her of being worse (3:11), for she was guilty of the same sins, plus hypocrisy, which the Lord detests. Even though she had the advantage over Israel of having the Temple and priests in her midst, as well Israel’s bad example from which to learn, she did not learn the lesson nor heed the Lord’s warnings (3:6-10).

The Lord’s great mercy is illustrated when He asked Jeremiah to face the north and tell the people of Israel, who were in captivity, that He was willing to accept them back if they would confess and truly repent. The Lord foretold, however, that only a small faithful remnant would repent and return to Zion (3:14-18, 22-25). Although there were some from the northern tribes who returned with those from Judah at the time of Cyrus’ decree, it appears that Jeremiah is speaking of a more distant future event — when all those who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, including “the nations” (i.e. the Gentiles) whose glory and blessing is in Him (4:2b), will come to the New Jerusalem which shall be called “The Throne of the Lord”. The Ark of the Covenant is mentioned here for the last time, although the last recorded historical event involving the Ark is in 2 Chronicles 35:3. It will no longer be considered God’s throne (Ex. 25:22), nor will they remember it or make another one (possibly inferring that the first one would be carried away and destroyed by enemies), for it symbolized the old covenant which has been fulfilled in Jesus; it also housed the Law of God, but that would not be needed, for in the New Covenant, God’s law was to be written on men’s hearts (cf. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:15-18; Ps. 40:8).

As well as calling for Israel's repentance, the Lord called upon Judah to repent of her hypocrisy and to internalize the law in their hearts. They also needed to wash and circumcise their hearts, so that the acts of worship and consecration to God would not be merely outward acts of religion (such as circumcision), for God looks at the heart of man (4:4; cf. Deut. 10:16; Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:3; Ps. 51:10). If Judah did not quickly repent, as they were urged (4:14), the fire of God's wrath would fall upon them; this is something she had brought upon herself due to her rebellion and foolishness (4:4b, 17-18, 22). In describing their judgment, Jeremiah was horror-stricken and grieved by what he envisioned: "The destroyer of nations" from the north (Babylon) would swiftly descend upon Judah and Jerusalem, destroying and plundering every city and fruitful field. Appealing to the enemy and their gods like a seductively dressed and painted harlot would not help, for those whom they emulated would be their murderers. God, however, graciously promised to not utterly destroy all of Judah, for He still had a plan. The remnant would return, and from their posterity He would raise up the coming Messiah.

### **Prayer**

Lord God, thank You for the wonderful promises You have made for Your faithful remnant. Cleanse us afresh today from any uncleanness or hypocrisy that might be in us, that we may be a pure and spotless Bride awaiting Your return.