

## God's Response to Unfaithfulness

10 January, 2010

By Rev. Lonny R. Bower

Scripture Reference – Jeremiah 3:1-25

**Unit Theme:** Major Prophets

**Central Truth:** God will restore those who turn to Him.

**Focus:** Explore God's offer of restoration and consider the consequences of rejecting and benefits of accepting it.

**Key Verse:** Jeremiah 3:12

### **Introduction:**

We must be careful not to presume self righteousness over the people of Judah. If it was not for the grace of God, we too would be named among them. Yet in all our unrighteousness, God still reaches into our lives offering hope and restoration. This is what we will see in today's lesson; God's divine nature of compassion, mercy, and grace reaching out to a people who had all but rejected Him. When I look back over my life and even compare it to others in this world, which have had similar seasons of rebellion, there is one thing that stands out for certain; God has not changed. He reached out to me during my rebellion and unbelief, just as He has countless others. He does this because of His unfailing love for us, He does this because it is not His will that any perish, but that all come to repentance (**2 Peter 3:9**). However, He is also a God of justice, justice that demands wrath for those who reject His righteousness. We must learn to hear the voice of God calling out to us; we must learn to surrender to the convicting power of His Holy Spirit wooing us back into His presence. If we don't, then we are left to ourselves with no one to come to our aid and once His wrath has begun there is nothing that can avert it – our opportunity to repent will be gone forever. God will move and speak through His servants often in the midnight hour when His wrath is but a millisecond away. This is where I believe many individuals are today; this is where I believe we are as a society. The choice is ours, we can surrender to the voice of God and return to Him with our whole heart, or we can ignore His conviction, reject the truth and face His wrath, not for just a moment but for eternity. For those who face the wrath of God in this life and subsequently eternal damnation, they know that they had the opportunity to return to God, but instead rejected His offer of salvation. It is my belief that Judah's greatest sin, as Israel's before her, was in the fact that they allowed themselves to be deceived by the things of this world and gradually fell away from their Jehovah jireh (God the provider). They simply didn't need God anymore, they had advanced (or so they thought) far enough in intellect and technology that they could not find a reason to turn to their provider any longer. If this is a true assessment, where does it leave us today? Our only hope is to recognize our need for God, even in the midst of all our knowledge, capabilities and unlimited

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communication. Those who recognize their need for God are the ones who will hear His offer of salvation, mercy and grace. I wonder how your story will end.

### I. Israel's Unfaithfulness – Jeremiah 3:1-10

The verdict is in, Judah is guilty of unfaithfulness just as Israel before her was. The tragedy, however, is in the fact that Judah watched Israel backslide and then witnessed firsthand the judgment of God as His wrath moved against their brothers to the North. Their story was no fairytale, Judah knew the reality of God's wrath, but refused to heed His offer to return. Instead they thought they could fool God. Their attempt was to fit in with the world around them while appearing to serve God. They prayed, but their words carried no meaning, they worshipped, but their worship was just tradition – going through the motions. Their hearts were deceptive and led them down a path of destruction. Jeremiah would later observe (**Jeremiah 17:9**) *"The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? Only God knows our hearts, He tests our minds as the next verse (10) proclaims. God's word is living and sharper than any two edged sword...able to discern the thoughts and intent of our hearts (Hebrews 4:12).* Though they convinced themselves that they had returned to God, the Lord knew it was not genuine, but only in pretense – just a show. Therefore we must search our hearts and ask God as the Psalmist did (**Psalms 139:23, 24**) to reveal where we have deceived ourselves, to expose the superficial and give us the true heart of worship. This is who God is seeking; true worshippers (**John 4:23**). We must determine in our hearts to go the way of righteousness, to learn from the example of so many that have gone before us. The Lord never promised us an easy road, in fact He assured us of just the opposite. However, He did promise us rest and this we shall find if we would but heed His voice and turn to Him with our whole heart.

➤ **Think about it:**

How can you know that you are not deceived by your own heart?


*"...unless you all repent you will all likewise perish" – Jesus, Luke 13:3*

### II. God's Admonition – Jeremiah 3:11-20

Judgment had all but run its course for the northern kingdom of Israel. Nearly 100 years had passed since the Assyrians carried them off captive. It appears that the remnant now had

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recognized that they needed the Lord. Therefore the Lord says that they are more righteous than Judah. It seems to be the norm even in our day that one has to hit rock bottom before they will acknowledge their need for God. However, God is there long before we hit rock bottom, He is there all along, calling out to us, longing to walk with us again. I am often reminded of Adam and Eve, after eating the fruit and realizing their shame, they did not call out to God for help, but God called out to them. It may be that we don't always recognize the voice of God, but one thing is for certain – He ever calls out to His children. It is God's desire to let us come into His presence and dwell there. It is in His presence where we will finally find rest for our souls. Yet we labor and we toil in our daily lives, we are burdened down by countless cares and God stands there saying to those who will hear. "Come unto me you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." (**Matthew 11:28**) The choice is ours, if we choose to, we will hear His voice, however, after we have heard, there remains yet another choice, to obey or not obey. My prayer is this, "Lord help me to hear and help me to obey."

➤ **Think about it:**

When was the last time you heard God speak?


*"All praise to our redeeming Lord, who joins us by His grace and bids us, each to each restored, together seek His face." – Charles Wesley*

### **III. Repentance and Promised Restoration – Jeremiah 3:21-22**

*<sup>1</sup>It is possible that in these verses Jeremiah was painting an idealistic picture for the people of Israel. The people mourn for their condition (v. 21), God offers repentance (v. 22a), and the people feel abject and heartfelt remorse for their sin (vv. 22b-25). But the Book of Jeremiah leads one to believe that the people did not follow this example. It still awaits the future repentance of the nation when Christ returns as King (Zech. 12:10-13:1). The section opens with the people weeping and pleading. Their cry was prompted because of their transgressions (they had perverted their ways) and because they had forgotten... their God. In Jeremiah's ideal picture of repentance the nation finally realized the depth of the pit into which she had fallen. God responded to the nation's cry by offering to help her if she would return. Israel's response is a model of true repentance. She consciously determined to come to... God because of who He is.*

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*Admitting that her idolatrous commotion which had been rampant in the land was a deception, the nation acknowledged that only in God is there salvation for Israel. The shame and disgrace of her past actions forced her to admit that she had sinned against the LORD.* What we see in this passage is the heart of God; He wants His children to repent and turn back to Him. It is not His desire to pour His wrath out upon His children, but because He is a just God, He will do just that upon those who reject His gracious offer of redemption. As a preacher of the word of God, I can understand why Jeremiah would picture such a scene. I don't know of a preacher who does not see in his heart the lost turning to God and the backslidden returning to the source of their former joy. We must never forget that it's not God's will that any perish – He has offered salvation to all. All one has to do is accept His free gift of salvation. Those who have, are living in complete and total restoration, where the former things are gone and all things have become new (2 **Corinthians 5:17**).

➤ **Think about it:**

Why would anyone reject such a great offer of restoration?


*"The amazing thing about Jesus is that He doesn't just patch up our lives, He gives us a brand-new sheet, a clean slate to start over, all new." – Gloria Gaither*

**Conclusion:**

Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no argument against the first part of this passage, it is well known sin leads to death. Furthermore, we have the testimony of countless generations as recorded in the scriptures. Example after example is given (starting with Adam) of the sin of man leading to death. Where there is sin death is the rule, however, there is hope of restoration for the sinner that repents and accepts the free gift of God. This hope is also clearly seen in the scriptures, for the redeemed are promised eternity where sin no longer exists and eternal rest is the rule. Where there is no sin, there is also no death, no sorrow, no sickness, no disease, but only righteousness. It almost sounds too good to be true, so there are many who reject this reality. What they accept in place of promised restoration is just the opposite, promised wrath. The residents of Jeremiah's day who rejected God's offer of restoration and were unwilling to repent, probably didn't believe

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that God would do what He said He would do. In fact many of them more than likely, did not even believe in God. Their unbelief however did not change the reality of the wrath they did endure, everything that God revealed to Jeremiah came to pass, Judah rejected God and chose damnation instead of restoration. In the end they chose to live for the moment instead of for eternity. It is no coincidence that this is the same thing the citizens of our day are doing, we too have a choice. We can repent and turn to God and live a life of righteousness and inherit an eternity of rest and restoration, or we can reject God, live a life of unrighteousness and inherit an eternity of wrath and damnation. There are only two choices – life or death, just as God gave the Israelites in Deuteronomy 30:19, He has given to us. His desire is that we choose life, but the choice is entirely up to us. Finally, when it is all said and done and the books are closed, one has nothing to lose by accepting the free gift of God. But on the contrary, one has everything to lose by rejecting the free gift of God. As long as we live in this flesh there is hope for our restoration, this is the mercy and patience of God. However, once we pass from this life the decision we made for life or death is eternal and final. Therefore, I chose life!

➤ **Think about it:**

If the current residents of eternity (both heaven and hell) could speak to us now – what would they say?


<sup>1</sup>The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Third edition, © 1985, SP Publications, Inc.

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*Except where I have paraphrased all scripture is taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.*

This study and others can be found at [www.fullmessage.org](http://www.fullmessage.org)

### Next Week's Lesson – Promise of a New Covenant

- I. **Nature of the New Covenant – Jeremiah 31:31-34**
- II. **Permanence of the New Covenant – Jeremiah 31:35-37**
- III. **Superiority of the New Covenant – Hebrews 8:1-13**