

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 2:32-3:5

Topic

While God remains faithful to her, Judah is described as an adulteress on a constant search for her next partner

Title

“Judah, Don’t Take Your Love to Town”

Introduction

In the classic film, *Butch Cassidy & the Sundance Kid*, the likable outlaws realize they must flee the country. Sundance’s girlfriend, Etta, is invited to come along but, true to his character, Sundance says to her, “if you want to go, I won’t stop you. But the minute you start to whine or make a nuisance, I don’t care where we are, I’m dumping you flat.”

To which Butch says, “Don’t sugarcoat it like that, Kid. Tell her straight.”

Whether it was a phrase that was in our general culture before the film I don’t know, but I do know that folks often say, “Don’t sugarcoat it. Give it to me straight.”

One thing about God. *He can give it to you straight with no sugarcoating!* The poster boy for Bible straight talk would have to be the apostle James. Writing to believers in Jesus Christ, writing to the church, he said,

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

That's some straight talk! He calls Christians “adulterers and adulteresses.” There’s no indication in the rest of his letter that these believers were involved in sexual sin of any kind. James was using an illustration, telling them (and us) that what they might see as a simple “friendship with the world,” God saw as us committing adultery in our relationship with Him.

What, exactly, constituted their “friendship with the world?”

- In chapter James he pointed out that by showing favoritism to wealthy believers while ignoring the plight of the poor they were being a friend of the world by adopting its values and attitudes.
- In chapter three James talks about ungodly speech and jealousy and selfish ambition as being friendship with the world.

OK, so if I show favoritism, or use ungodly speech, or am jealous, or am selfish, **that makes me an adulterer or an adulteress???**

Yeah, it does! Things we might excuse as tolerable by saying “That’s just the way I am,” he says comprise spiritual adultery.

God delivers similar straight talk to Judah in our verses in Jeremiah. They were spiritual adulterers and adulteresses.

What’s truly wonderful, however, is that despite their adulteries, God remained ardent in His love for them and was calling them to return to their first love.

I’ll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 When You Leave Your First Love God Says You Are An Adulterer, and #2 When You Leave Your First Love God Stays Ardent In His.

#1 When You Leave Your First Love
God Says You Are An Adulterer
(2:32-37)

James, in his letter, wasn't suggesting we could be perfect. He was emphasizing that God takes our relationship seriously and we should quit sugarcoating our defections from Him. Telling it like it is gives us the best chance at repentance and a return to our first love.

Jeremiah 2:32 Can a virgin forget her ornaments, Or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.

God saw Judah as having been a young "virgin" betrothed who He had given "ornaments" (gifts) to remind her of His love as her Bridegroom. Then she was the bride, beautifully attired by the Lord.

They had "forgotten" the first love of their betrothal. It wasn't simply a strain on the relationship; the Jews were unfaithful, stepping-out on the Lord.

Jeremiah 2:33 "Why do you beautify your way to seek love? Therefore you have also taught The wicked women your ways.

Like an adulteress, they "beautified [their] way to seek" other relationships. Their defections were not minor or excusable. In fact, they were so unfaithful they could teach even the most "wicked women" a thing or two about cheating on their Beloved.

Jeremiah 2:34 Also on your skirts is found The blood of the lives of the poor innocents. I have not found it by secret search, But plainly on all these things.

He gives an example of their unfaithfulness. They were oppressing the poor and needy rather than defending and upholding them. It's very similar to the things James says in the New Testament when calling believers "adulterers and adulteresses."

No matter their excuses, their treatment of those less advantaged was obvious. The fact they denied it only indicated how deceptive sin can be when our sensitivities to the Lord are blunted.

Jeremiah 2:35 Yet you say, 'Because I am innocent, Surely His anger shall turn from me.' Behold, I will plead My case against you, Because you say, 'I have not sinned.'

The word for “innocent” can mean *clean* or *purged* or *acquitted*. It could be that because they still were going through the motions of going to the Temple and offering sacrifice that they thought it was cleansing them even though they simultaneously were worshipping idols.

Jeremiah 2:36 Why do you gad about so much to change your way? Also you shall be ashamed of Egypt as you were ashamed of Assyria.

Now there’s a word we don’t use too much anymore: “gad,” as in “gad[ding] about.” It means *to move about restlessly*. Here it was describing their going about seeking political alliances. The Jews had sought an alliance with Assyria, and now were looking to Egypt, in order to aid them against Babylon.

You know that phrase we use, “politics makes for strange bedfellows?” God saw it as adultery. Why turn to Assyria and Egypt when He was ready to defend them? They were trusting more in politics than in their relationship with Him.

Jeremiah 2:37 Indeed you will go forth from him With your hands on your head; For the LORD has rejected your trusted allies, And you will not prosper by them.

Egypt would prove to be no help to them. This idea of their “hands on their head” was an expression of surprise and fear rather than captivity. The surprise would be that both Assyria and Egypt would fall.

When the Assyrian capital of Nineveh was overrun by the Babylonians in 612BC, the Assyrians moved their capital to Harran (now in Turkey). When the Babylonians captured Harran in 608BC, the Assyrian capital was moved to Carchemish.

The Battle of Carchemish was fought in May/June of 605BC between an allied army of Egyptians and Assyrians against the Babylonian army. The *Babylonian Chronicles*, now housed in the British Museum, claim that Nebuchadnezzar "crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Carchemish. The armies fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat and beat them to nonexistence. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped

from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, the Babylonians overtook and defeated them in the district of Hamath so that not a single man escaped to his own country."

Before the battle of Carchemish Egypt had one of the greatest armies in northern Africa and was a threat to the Middle East. The Babylonians destroyed the power of Egypt and the independent existence of Assyria. Babylon became master of the Middle East.

Of all the metaphors and illustrations He could have employed, God chose to remind Judah she was His beloved wife. God didn't say they were slightly off course. He didn't tell them that they were missing His best for them.

No, He called them adulterers and adulteresses of the worst kind!

Ask the Lord to "give it to you straight" and He will! First love is too good a place for you to remain for Him to sugarcoat even minor defections.

#2 When You Leave Your First Love
God Stays Ardent In His
(3:1-5)

It's no surprise, really, that believers fall short and commit spiritual adultery. What is wonderful is God's unchanging, everlasting love for us in the face of our unfaithfulness.

Jeremiah 3:1 "They say, 'If a man divorces his wife, And she goes from him And becomes another man's, May he return to her again?' Would not that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the harlot with many lovers; Yet return to Me," says the LORD.

An important passage in Deuteronomy twenty-four spells out a husband giving a bill of divorce to an unfaithful wife. It prohibits the wife from ever returning to the husband who divorced her.

God brings this up here, not to give a teaching on divorce and remarriage, but to exclaim that even though He was within His rights as a Husband to

give Judah a bill of divorce, He nevertheless wanted her to “return” to Him. Even though Judah had been “a harlot with many lovers,” God would forgive her and receive her and love her just as fervently. He would not give her a bill of divorce.

Jeremiah 3:2 "Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men? By the road you have sat for them Like an Arabian in the wilderness; And you have polluted the land With your harlotries and your wickedness.

There's a sense in which we should be shocked by this kind of language. There should be gasps when it's read publicly. We should issue warnings that it's rated R for language and strong visual images.

We're a little too desensitized to these kind of things. The world loves to bombard us with things that desensitize us to the Lord. Truth be told, we don't want to come across as prudes or as being old-fashioned. We want to break free from the stereotypes of Christians as being those who blush. We want to be out on the cutting edge.

Pastor and author John MacArthur had this to say about the cutting edge:

Worldly preachers seem to go out of their way to put their carnal expertise on display - even in their sermons. In the name of connecting with “the culture” they want their people to know they have seen all the latest programs on MTV; familiarized themselves with all the key themes of “South Park”; learned the lyrics to countless tracks of gangsta rap and heavy metal music; and watched who-knows-how-many R-rated movies. They seem to know every fad top to bottom, back to front, and inside out. They've adopted both the style and the language of the world - including lavish use of language that used to be deemed inappropriate in polite society, much less in the pulpit. They want to fit right in with the world, and they seem to be making themselves quite comfortable there.

MacArthur goes on to talk about one popular contemporary pastor in the Pacific Northwest whose admirers have affectionately labelled, “the cussing pastor.”

While we as believers argue back-and-forth about the inappropriateness or appropriateness of certain worldly behaviors, might not God simply say it is adultery? *That's the real cutting edge!*

Jeremiah 3:3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, And there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; You refuse to be ashamed.

God had been disciplining them by withholding necessary rain. Now in that time, to His chosen nation, God had promised rain when they were obedient and to withhold it when they were not. It spoke volumes to them about where they were at. It was a true 'rain-gauge' of spirituality.

Instead of admitting their unfaithfulness, they had "a harlot's forehead," meaning they looked at God with pride, refusing to be "ashamed."

Apparently they had enough resources to get through those tough economic times.

Our own resources and resourcefulness can overcome God's early discipline when someone is drifting from their first love. If that's the case in general... How much more it's the case for us in the West, and in the US, who have so much in the way of both resources and resourcefulness? We must become extra vigilant.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Bilbo gives Frodo his Elven sword, *Sting* to carry on his quest. He says to him, "The blade glows blue when Orcs are close... and it's times like that, my lad when you have to be extra careful."

The Word of God is our light and it glows all the time as we are walking through the world. We're not prudes to pursue holiness. We need to be extra careful.

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

God breaks out another metaphor - that of the Father waiting for His child to repent and return and admit that his upbringing was good. "From this time" reminds us that we can repent and return any time. Like the father of the prodigal son, the Lord waits and watches.

Jeremiah 3:5 Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?' Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, As you were able."

In another passage, in Micah 7:18, we read,

Micah 7:18 Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy.

Our God; our Father; our Bridegroom; “delights in mercy.”

Let that wash over you, as it were. *Our God delights in mercy!* He delights in *not* giving us what we deserve but, instead, in giving us what we do not deserve.

There is one very simple application for us from this passage. **Don't sugarcoat the things God is telling you.** You see, He gives us straight talk, but we tend to tone it down. I'm just being friendly with the world! It's a gray area, isn't it?

Maybe! Or maybe it's adultery.

Are you... Am I... In first love with Him? Or is some friendship with the world - however small or great - an act of adultery against my faithful Bridegroom?