

Jeremiah 2:1 - 3  
Love's Labor Lost?

<sup>1</sup>The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup>"Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:

*"I remember the devotion of your youth,  
How as a bride you loved me  
And followed me through the desert,  
Through a land not sown.  
<sup>3</sup> Israel was holy to the LORD,  
The first fruits of his harvest;  
All who devoured her were held guilty,  
And disaster overtook them,"*

declares the LORD.



**Remembering:** The first part of this complex and lengthy oracle opens with a simple assertion from the LORD, "I remember." Of course, we know that, being omniscient, the LORD can never forget.<sup>1</sup> But we can and do. In affirming that He remembers Israel, the LORD gently invites Israel to remember Him as well. The events remembered are those that Israel shared with the LORD as they followed Him through the desert. The LORD's time with Israel in the desert was not without trouble. Israel systematically provoked the LORD to anger.<sup>2</sup> It is likely that the time remembered is the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The memory is three-fold and emphasizes those things that should be present and nurtured in our own spiritual relationship with the LORD. 1) They loved the LORD as a bride loves her new husband. 2) They followed the LORD wherever He led though it was a "desert" and "a land not sown" (i.e., barren, not able to support life). 3) They were holiness unto the LORD (i.e., they kept themselves from sin and served the LORD wholeheartedly and exclusively). But love is a 'two-way street.' The LORD subtly asks Israel to remember how He loved them. They were His first fruits and He was careful to protect them from any who dared to "eat" them (i.e., make war on them). Their enemies incurred guilt and were overtaken by disaster.

**Forgetting:** Part of Israel's apostasy was bound up with forgetfulness. Their love like that of a young bride, for whom the groom provided jewelry to adorn her on their wedding day. That jewelry was an expression of his love and would become her special treasure. The condemnation of verse 32 anchors the charge of Israel's forgetfulness in this imagery.

*Does a maiden forget her jewelry,  
A bride her wedding ornaments?  
Yet my people have forgotten me,  
Days without number.*

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<sup>1</sup> When the LORD says "... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34c) The reference is to taking no further action against their sin, *as if* they were forgotten. The punishment having been sufficient, He chooses to ignore the memory of their sin and therefore, in effect, forgets. Forgetfulness is integral to forgiveness.

<sup>2</sup> Numbers 14:11, 20 – 23 "And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?" Moses interceded for the children of Israel, so that the LORD told him, "... I have pardoned according to thy word. But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely, they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it."

**Repentance:** In remembering, the LORD invites Israel to do the same. We customarily think of remembering happy events as a fun pastime like looking at old photos in an album. Here, remembrance Israel's early days is to be part of their repentance. The glorified Christ tells the little church at Ephesus, "... I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."<sup>3</sup> Forgetfulness is not always accidental. It can be willful. Paul locates this dynamic at the core of the emergence of sin in humanity. "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, (*i.e., they wanted to forget God*) God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient..."<sup>4</sup> What were the first works?

**Relational Pillars: Loving the LORD** Jesus presents love as the foundation of the law. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."<sup>5</sup> The place of intimate fellowship was the wilderness, a kind of 'bridal chamber' where mutual conjugal love found its first and most exciting expression. The close relation between worship of idols and sexual promiscuity, infidelity, and prostitution builds on this parabolic similarity between sexual activity and worship. Repentance which is a precursor to restoration involves the wilderness. "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her, her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor <sup>6</sup> for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. And it shall be at that day, saith the LORD, that thou shalt call me Ishi; (*i.e., my husband*) and shalt call me no more Baali (*i.e., my master*). For I will take away the names of Baalim<sup>7</sup> out of her mouth, and they shall no more be remembered by their name."<sup>8</sup>

**Relational Pillars: Following the LORD** In the scriptures, following has marital, religious, and political implications. It was customary in biblical times for a wife to follow her husband not walk beside him. In religious practice, the host of worshippers followed the god as it was paraded through the town. In political practice it was customary to follow the king in royal ceremonies or into battle. All three usages suggest loyalty and are evoked in this passage. Following is also a choice. People had to choose who they were to follow. "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."<sup>9</sup> "That Israel should have been loyal to Yahweh through the wilderness is loyalty indeed"<sup>10</sup>

**Relational Pillars: Holiness unto the LORD:** The term holy (as used here) is not used in a moral sense. Israel was marked by sin (including worshipping the Golden Calf) in the wilderness. The word translated holy, קֹדֶשׁ (ko'-desh), means a sacred place or thing consecrated to the exclusive use of the LORD or His service. Israel was therefore a people who were exclusively the LORD's and were meant for His service alone. Holiness in this sense goes along with the exclusivity of who is followed as above. Jesus summarizes this choice for us. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Revelation 2:4 – 5 For marriages in trouble, the act of remembering happy times when love was unsullied by selfishness (*i.e., their engagement or honeymoon*) can help the struggling couple to "do the first works" and reignite the flame of love that brought them together in the first place. The same dynamic is at work here.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 1:28

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 22:37

<sup>6</sup> עֶכּוֹר aw-kore' meaning troubled also the name of a place in Palestine:--Achor. The valley of trouble will become the door of hope.

<sup>7</sup> Plural form of Baal, a Phoenician deity

<sup>8</sup> Hosea 2:14 - 17

<sup>9</sup> 1 Kings 18:21

<sup>10</sup> William L. Holladay Jeremiah Vol 1 Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commenary on the Bible page 84

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 6:24