

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 2

### *Israel Forsakes God*

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the LORD, “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. 3 Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt; disaster came upon them, declares the LORD.” 4 Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. 5 Thus says the LORD: “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless? 6 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?’ 7 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. 8 The priests did not say, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit. 9 “Therefore I still contend with you, declares the LORD, and with your children's children I will contend. 10 For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has been such a thing. 11 Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. 12 Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, 13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. 14 “Is Israel a slave? Is he a homeborn servant? Why then has he become a prey? 15 The lions have roared against him; 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 have shaved the crown of your head. 17 Have you not brought this upon yourself by forsaking the LORD your God, when he led you in the way? 18 And now what do you gain by going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? 19 Your evil will chastise you, and your apostasy will reprove you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God; the fear of me is not in you, declares the Lord GOD of hosts. 20 “For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, ‘I will not serve.’ Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore. 21 Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? 22 Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord GOD. 23 How can you say, ‘I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals?’ Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done—a restless young camel running here and there, 24 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. 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.’ 26 “As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed: they, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets, 27 who say to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ 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!’ 28 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. 29 “Why do you contend with me? You have all transgressed against me, declares the LORD. 30 In vain have I struck your

**children; they took no correction; your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravaging lion. 31 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’? 32 Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. 33 “How well you direct your course to seek love! So that even to wicked women you have taught your ways. 34 Also 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 35 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.’ 36 How much you go about, changing your way! You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria. 37 From 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.**

**2:1–6:30** It is generally agreed that these chapters are among Jeremiah’s earliest discourses, delivered during the reign of Josiah (3:6). The basic theme is the virtually total apostasy of Judah (chs. 2–5), leading inevitably to divine retribution through foreign invasion (ch. 6). (CSB)

**2:1–3:5** The wickedness and backsliding of God’s people are vividly portrayed in numerous colorful figures of speech. (CSB)

No date for this oracle is given. Jeremiah apparently gives it a leading position in the record of his prophetic activity because it provided the reader with an epitome of his preaching. (TLSB)

**2:1** *in hearing of Jerusalem* – The expression “in the ears” showing that the prophet should preach to the people living in this center of idolatry with clamoring insistence. (Kretzmann)

**2:2** *devotion*. The Hebrew for this word refers to the most intimate degree of loyalty, love and faithfulness that can exist between two people or between an individual and the Lord. (CSB)

*youth ... as a bride*. Early in her history, Israel had enjoyed a close and cordial relationship with the Lord, who is often described figuratively as Israel’s husband (3:14; 31:32; Isa 54:5; Hos 2:16). (CSB)

*you loved me*. But later God’s people forsook him and loved “foreign gods” (v. 25), tragically abandoning their first love (cf. Rev 2:4). (CSB)

Jeremiah is not idealizing the past. At the time of their espousal to the Lord, the Israelites murmured and sinned against Him, but as He led them through the wilderness, they remained His covenant people to whom He gave the Promised Land. For the marriage bond as a symbol of God’s relationship to His people see Hos 2; Rev 21:2. (TLSB)

*followed me*. But later they followed “worthless idols” (vv. 5, 8), “the Baals” (v. 23). (CSB)

**2:3** *holy to the LORD*. Set apart to him and his service. (CSB)

God chose Israel to be the bearer of His promise. He protected them as a farmer guards choice crops and declared “all who ate” of them guilty of theft. (TLSB)

*firstfruits*. Just as the “best of the firstfruits” of Israel’s crops were to be brought to the Lord (Ex 23:19; see Nu 18:12; 2Ch 31:5; Eze 44:30), so also the people themselves were his first and choicest treasure (cf. Jas 1:18; Rev 14:4). (CSB)

*disaster came upon them.* His punishment descended upon the Amalekites, the Amorites, and upon all other nations that interfered with His plans of love toward His chosen people. Such were the manifestations of Jehovah's mercy and kindness to Israel, and therefore His rebuke certainly came with good reason. (Kretzmann)

**2:4** *Hear.*† A common divine imperative in prophetic writings, summoning God's people—as well as the nations—into his courts to remind them of their covenant obligations to him and, when necessary, to pass judgment on them (see, e.g., 7:2; 17:20; 19:3; 21:11; 22:2, 29; 31:10; 42:15; 44:24, 26; Isa 1:10; Eze 13:2; Hos 4:1; Am 7:16). (CSB)

Jeremiah draws on the history of both Northern Kingdom (called Israel or Jacob) and the Southern Kingdom, consisting mainly of the tribe of Judah. Later he compares the guilt of the two “sisters” (3:6-10). (TLSB)

**2:5** *Thus says the LORD.* The so-called messenger formula, introducing God's word through the prophet. Though frequent in overall occurrence, its use is restricted to Jeremiah, Isaiah (e.g., 7:7), Ezekiel (e.g., 2:4), Amos (e.g., 1:3), Obadiah (1), Micah (3:5), Nahum (1:12), Haggai (e.g., 1:2), Zechariah (e.g., 1:3) and Malachi (1:4). (CSB)

*what wrong...find in me* – Here the Lord feels numbed. He asks Judah, “What happened?” Using the image of the courtroom, the Lord plays the role of the plaintiff. He asks, “Why?” He had kept His part of the covenant. (PBC)

*went after worthless.* “Worthless” is Jeremiah's favorite way of describing idols (8:19; 10:8, 15; 14:22; 16:19; 51:18). (CSB)

A derisive term for idols; also translated “false gods.” (TLSB)

*became worthless.* See 2Ki 17:15. Idolaters are no better than the idols they worship (see Ps 115:8). (CSB)

**2:6** *LORD... brought us up from the land of Egypt,* freed his people from Egyptian bondage so that they might serve him alone (Ex 20:2–6). (CSB)

*led us.* As a shepherd leads his sheep (see v. 17; Dt 8:15; Ps 23:2–3). (CSB)

*land of deserts and pits.* The desert often symbolized darkness with its attendant dangers, including death (v. 31; 9:10; 12:12; 17:6; 23:10; Ps 44:19). (CSB)

A related term appears on the Mesha Stela (Moabite Stone), where it refers to a public underground reservoir dug by Israelite captives. For large cities, such reservoirs could hold tens of thousands of gallon. (TLSB)

The Lord illustrated the folly of the nation with a powerful picture. In the semi-ardid and desert regions of the holy land nothing is more precious than water. The most valuable of all sources of water was a free-flowing spring. All year long it would gush forth sweet and fresh life-giving water. Such a spring guaranteed life for the people and herds who drank from it. The Lord was such a life-giving fountain to Israel. He had never failed to supply all their wants and needs. In the desert no one would be so foolish as to give up such a spring of water. Yet this was the very thing Israel had done; it had surrendered the Lord of life. (PBC)

**2:7** *plentiful*. The Hebrew for this word is *karmel*, translated “orchards” in 48:33 and also used as the name of a place (see Isa 33:9 and note). Rendered “fruitful land” in 4:26, it is the opposite of a desert. (CSB)

*defiled my land*.† Made the holy land unclean. (CSB)

*heritage*. The promised land, given by God to Israel as a legacy and often intimately associated with the people themselves (see especially 12:7–9, 14–15). (CSB)

*abomination*. He was filled with loathing for the land which He had chosen for them (Kretzmann)

**2:8** No one consulted the Lord (see v. 6). (CSB)

*priests ... shepherds ... prophets*. Though they knew the law of God, the religious and civil leaders deliberately perverted it and so misled the people. Chapters 20-38 describe Jeremiah’s protracted conflict with those in authority. (TLSB)

*shepherds*. A term used elsewhere to denote rulers (23:1–4; 49:19; 50:44; see especially Eze 34:1–10, 23–24). (CSB)

*by Baal*. In the name of Baal (cf. 11:21; 14:15; 23:25; 26:9). (CSB)

*do not profit*. Lit. “unprofitable” (see v. 11; the Hebrew for this word is not the same as that in v. 5, though the meaning is similar). (CSB)

**2:10** *Cyprus*. Represents the western nations and regions. (CSB)

*Kedar*. Represents the eastern nations and region. (CSB)

The Lord charges His people with a faithlessness not found even among the heathen nations, from the Great Sea in the west (Cyprus or Kittim) to the nomadic peoples in the east (Kedar in the North Arabian Desert). (TLSB)

The Lord called the whole world to witness. From west to east there had never been anything like this. (PBC)

**2:11** *Has ... gods?* A rhetorical question, clearly expecting a negative answer and emphasizing how incredible is Judah’s practice of substituting idolatry for the worship of the Lord. (CSB)

No nation changes its gods; but that is precisely what Israel had done. It had abandoned the true God for worthless idols. (PBC)

*their Glory*. God (see Ps 106:20; Hos 4:7; see also 1Sa 15:29). (CSB)

Exchanging their possession of Jehovah, the true God, for vain idols, with less consistency than that shown by the ignorant and despised heathen. (Kretzmann)

**2:12** *Be appalled ... O heavens*. The Hebrew for these phrases offers a striking play on words: *shommu shamayim*. (CSB)

**2:13** *me...fountain of living* God himself provides life-giving power to his people (v 21:6). (CSB)

“This life is eternal, incorruptible, and will never perish... God lives of Himself and of His own nature, but life is essential to God, and, in fact, God is life itself” (ThC E2 § 159). (TLSB)

*broken cisterns.* Watertight plaster was used to keep cisterns from losing water. Idols, like broken cisterns, will always fail their worshipers; by contrast, God provides life abundant and unending. (CSB)

These were private reservoirs, cut into bedrock, collected rainwater that ran off rooftops and courtyards. Cisterns were often bell or bottle shaped, with a narrow mouth covered by a stone. Porous rock required lime plaster to make it watertight. (TLSB)

**2:14-19** Further evidence of Israel’s defection was their trust in foreign alliances with godless nations rather than in God Himself. This foolish policy caused the Northern Kingdom to fall prey to the Assyrians, to whom King Ahaz earlier had appealed for help (2 Kg 16:5-9). Negotiations with Egypt would also be as disastrous as they had been in the past. (TLSB)

**2:14** *Is ... hometown servant?* Another rhetorical question (see note on v. 11), again expecting a negative answer in the light of God’s redemptive acts during the period of the exodus (see Ex 6:6; 20:2). (CSB)

A home-born servant was born of a slave woman and therefore destined to permanent slavery. (TLSB)

*prey.* To Assyria and Egypt (see vv. 15–16). (CSB)

**2:15** *Lions.* Possibly literal (see 2Ki 17:25–26), though probably here symbolizing Assyria. (CSB)

*roared.* Raising their voices in a roar of triumph. (Kretzmann)

*cities are in ruins,,without inhabitant.* The Hebrew for this phrase is very similar to that in 4:7, rendered there “towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant” (cf. 22:6). (CSB)

This is the condition of Israel which the prophet sees in spirit, the picture of the devastation wrought by beasts of prey being particularly fitting to describe the desolation of the land of Israel after the overthrow by the Chaldeans. (Kretzmann)

**2:16** *Memphis.* Capital of Lower Egypt. (TLSB)

*Tahpanhes.* Probably the city later called Daphnai by the Greeks, located just south of Lake Menzaleh in the eastern delta region of Egypt and known today as Tell Defneh (see 43:7–9; 44:1; 46:14; Eze 30:18). (CSB)

*shaved the crown of your head.* Figurative for bringing disgrace and devastation (see 47:5; 48:37; see also notes on Isa 3:17; 7:20). (CSB)

**2:17** *have you brought this upon yourself* – The people of Judah and Israel failed to find a solution to their problems because they stubbornly refused to identify the root of those problems. They blamed the prophets; they blamed the kings; they blamed the priests; they blamed the weather; they blamed the Lord. But the fault was their own. Their sin had found them out. The Lord had lavished every blessing upon them. He had planted them a choice vine, capable of producing good fruit. They were without excuse. The only answer lay in repentance, in turning away from their sin and turning to the Lord and receiving His forgiveness. (PBC)

*the way.* See Ex 18:8; 23:20; Dt 1:33. (CSB)

On the good path of His will, on the road of righteousness. (Kretzmann)

**2:18–19** Israel’s sin of faithlessness would condemn them no matter which foreign nation they turned to for relief. At Carchemish in 605 BC, the combined forces of Egypt and Assyria could not repulse the Babylonians from marching into Israel. Revolts against Babylonian domination, inspired by promises of help from Egypt, also proved futile. The struggle for supremacy between the world powers, represented by the Euphrates in the northeast and the Nile in the southwest, would end in the subjugation of Israel and Judah. (TLSB)

**2:18** The tendency of Israel or Judah to seek help alternately from Egypt and Assyria was not restricted to Jeremiah’s time (see, e.g., Hos 7:11; 12:2). (CSB)

*drink the water.* Provided by enemies, whether national or spiritual, rather than by God. (CSB)

**2:19** *apostasy.* See 3:22; 5:6; 14:7. The word implies repeated apostasy. (CSB)

Wherever the fear of God does not guide and direct the conduct of men, they are bound to pay for their defection and apostasy sooner or later. (Kretzmann)

**2:20–3:6** The rebellion of Judah against God is vividly portrayed by Jeremiah with the use of numerous figures of speech. (CSB)

**2:20–22** Israel’s refusal to trust and serve the Lord expressed itself in brazen worship of Baal, which had begun long before. Reveling shamelessly in the seductive fertility rites of their idol, the chosen people became degenerate. (TLSB)

**2:20** Like a stubborn draft animal (see Hos 4:16), Judah refuses to obey the Lord’s commands. (CSB)

*burst your bonds and burst your bonds.* See 5:5; see also 31:18; cf. Ps 2:3. Judah has broken God’s law and violated his covenant. (CSB)

*I will not serve* – Israel refused to be restrained from wickedness by the terms to which they had agreed in the covenant. (TLSB)

*on every high hill and under every green tree.* Locales of pagan worship (see 1Ki 14:23; 2Ki 17:10; Eze 6:13). (CSB)

*like a whore.* Ritual prostitution was a particularly detestable practice (see, e.g., Hos 4:10–14). (CSB)

**2:21** *choice vine.* See Isa 5:2. The Hebrew for this word refers to a grape of exceptional quality. (CSB)

Refers to dark red grapes that grew in the Sorek Valley. Cyril of Jerusalem says, “A fearful thing is sin, and the sorest disease of the soul is transgression, secretly cutting its sinews, and becoming also the cause of eternal fire; an evil of a man’s own choosing, and offspring of the will. For that we sin of our own free will the Prophet says plainly...The planting was good, the fruit coming from the will is evil; and therefore the planter is blameless, but the vine shall be burnt with fire; since it was planted for good, and bore fruit unto evil of its own will. (TLSB)

*wild*. Lit. “foreign.” A vine symbolizing Israel should not be like a vine symbolizing Israel’s enemies (see Dt 32:32). (CSB)

**2:22** *wash yourself*. The guilt of sin is an inner stain that outward ceremonies cannot remove. *lye ... soap*. Solution of sodium hydroxide and/or potash, obtained from regional plants. (TLSB)

*lye ... soap*. Mineral alkali and vegetable alkali respectively. Sins can be removed and forgiven (see Ps 51:2, 7; Isa 1:18), but only when the sinner repents and confesses (see Pr 28:13; cf. 1Jn 1:7, 9). (CSB)

**2:23-24** Like female animals in heat, the people could not be restrained from seeking to gratify their insatiable lust. The Holy Scriptures compare the heart of the unregenerate person to a hard stone (Ez 36:26). It does not yield to the one who touches it, but resists. It is like a rough block and a wild, unmanageable beast. This does not mean that since the fall a person is longer a rational creature. (TLSB)

**2:23** *the valley*. Probably the Hinnom Valley, known also as the Valley of Ben Hinnom<sup>7</sup>. (CSB)

This was south of Jerusalem where children were sacrificed to Molech. (TLSB)

*running here and there*.† Instead, the people of Judah should have remained loyal to the Lord, not turning aside either “to the right or to the left” (Dt 28:14). (CSB)

**2:24** *wild donkey*. An unruly (see Ge 16:12) and intractable (see Job 39:5–8) animal. (CSB)

The onager, a zebra-like animal, never domesticated. (TLSB)

*sniffing the wind*. The picture is one of active searching, not passive waiting (see Hos 2:7, 13). (CSB)

**2:25** *going unshod*. You wear out your sandals. (CSB)

As slaves were forced to do. (TLSB)

*It is hopeless*. It is useless to argue, since she is firmly resolved to go on on her sinful course. (Kretzmann)

*I have loved foreigners*. As opposed to the love Judah was expected to express toward God under the terms of their covenant relationship (see, e.g., Dt 6:6; 7:7–13; Hos 2:14–3:1). (CSB)

**2:26-28** Too late the people will realize the futility of turning their back on their Creator and entrusting their fate to impotent gods. There will come a time of trouble when, like a thief caught in the act, they will be shamed to admit that the idols they made for themselves cannot save them. (TLSB)

**2:26** *shamed when caught*. See, e.g., Ex 22:3–4. The Hebrew word underlying “disgraced” means lit. “shame,” a term often used as a pejorative synonym for the name of Baal, the chief god of Canaan. (CSB)

**2:27** *arise and save us*. When affliction and trouble bring them to their senses, then they will turn to Jehovah for help. Cp. Luke 15, 16-18. (Kretzmann)

**2:28** *as many as your cities are your gods*. Every ancient Near Eastern town of any importance had its own patron deity (cf. Ac 19:28, 34–35), and many towns were named after deities. (CSB)

**2:29-32** When disaster does overtake them, the people will have no reason to complain against the Lord. For them to forget their God was as abnormal and irrational as a bride forgetting to put on her wedding attire. (TLSB)

**2:30** *I struck your children.* Cf. Heb 12:6. (CSB)

In endeavoring to bring them to their senses; they received no correction, they would not permit themselves to be guided on the right path. (Kretzmann)

**2:31** *generation.* Often has negative connotations (see, e.g., Dt 32:5). (CSB)

Children of perverseness now living! (Kretzmann)

*Have I been a wilderness... a land of thick darkness?* On the contrary, the Lord led his people through the desert and its darkness (v. 6). The phrase “great darkness” translates the Hebrew for “darkness of the LORD” (i.e., darkness sent by the Lord; cf. 1Sa 26:12), just as “mighty flame” in SS 8:6 translates “flame of the LORD.” (CSB)

**2:32** *my people have forgotten me.* See 18:15; see also 3:21; 13:25; Isa 17:10; Eze 22:12; 23:35; Hos 8:14. Israel was always to “remember” the Lord and all that he had done for her (Dt 7:18; 8:18) and so trust and worship him alone, but she often “forgot” him—put him out of mind (see Jdg 2:10; Hos 2:13). (CSB)

Israel should have clung to her God, her highest and most precious Ornament and Possession, by whom she had been so richly blessed. Instead of that she forsook Jehovah, not only once, in an unguarded moment, but continually. (Kretzmann)

**2:33** *love.* Here, worship of pagan gods. (CSB)

**2:34** *guiltless poor.* Innocent of a crime such as breaking in to steal. (TLSB)

**2:36** *put to shame by Egypt ... by Assyria.* The days of Ahaz (see 2Ch 28:21), and perhaps the days of Zedekiah (see 37:7), are in view here. (CSB)

**2:37** *with your hands on your head.* Ancient reliefs depict captives with wrists tied together above their heads. (CSB)

Bound as prisoners. Such a scene is depicted on the wall of the temple at Medinet Habu, Egypt. (TLSB)

*those in whom you trust.* Egypt and Assyria. (CSB)