

You Have Lived as a Prostitute With Many Lovers, Would You Now Return to Me?

3: 1-5

DIG: What does the analogy of divorce mean in this context? Who is the one properly entitled to seek divorce: God or Judah? Who is the one seeking reconciliation? Who is the one likely to reject that effort? Why is that?

REFLECT: How do you show your loyalty to the LORD as your first love? Is there any way in which you have left your first love of Him? Has something or someone else taken His place? How do you handle conflicts of loyalty between ADONAI and other loves (such as Y'hudah found herself in)? How important is loyalty to you in your relationship apart from YHVH? To what or whom do you feel most loyal? Why?

During the reign of Josiah

The picture here is of Judah as an unfaithful wife who had turned away (**shuwb**) to lovers and is strongly reminiscent of Hosea's unfaithful wife Gomer. Y'hudah had the forehead of a prostitute (Hebrew: *zona*), had lived as a prostitute with many lovers, and was guilty of prostitution (*zenunim*). These same terms occur in both Jeremiah and Hosea.

ADONAI had rejected those Judah trusted (2:37b). So He said: If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return (**shuwb**) to her again? Remarriage was forbidden in that circumstance (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Isra'el had gone after many lovers (Hosea 2:2-5). One only needed to go to the high places to see the Ba'al altars set up for her idols. The Land had been completely defiled. Now the question in Chapter 3 is: what will happen next? What will God do?

The crisis turns on the grace and love of ADONAI. Taking a prostitute wife back is clearly prohibited by the Torah. But in spite of this fact, YHVH yearns for the return of Judah to the covenant. This violates Torah and common sense. No husband in his right mind would be so vulnerable as to take back such a fickle wife. This is stunning. Against all expectations God will risk humiliation and defilement. If only she would be faithful.

God had every right to reject His people because they had abandoned Him, not in order to marry another "husband," but in order to play the field. But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers - would you now return (**shuwb**) to Me? declares ADONAI (3:1). Isra'el needed to decide once and for all; she could not play fast and loose with her loyalties.

This savage indictment likens lustful **Judah** to an ambushing Arab. **Look up to the barren heights and see. Is there any place where you have not been ravished? By the roadside you sat waiting for lovers (Genesis 38:14-16), sat like a nomad in the desert.** This scene drips with irony. One would expect a lone woman on the road to be ambushed. Shamelessly, however, the woman assumes the role of the ambusher, so desperate is **she** for any **lover**.⁴⁸ So was **Judah** eager to embrace every form of idolatry. **You have defiled the Land with your prostitution and wickedness (3:2).**

Far too many of **the people** thought that consorting with Ba'al would ensure rain and fertility; in fact, the opposite had happened. **Therefore, the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen (Leviticus 26:19). Yet you have the brazen look, the forehead (Hebrew: *metsach*) of a prostitute.** A (set) brow on the forehead, symbolizes resolution, determination, or negatively, stubbornness and intractability (**Ezekiel 3:7-9; Isaiah 48:4**). **You refuse to blush with shame (3:3).** Even in the face of a drought, **Judah** refused to be ashamed of **her** actions. **Her** thinking had deteriorated to the point where **she** wasn't even embarrassed over **her** spiritual adultery.

Have you not just called to Me, "My Father, my friend from my youth, will you always be angry (3:4-5a)? Ha'Shem yearns for reconciliation, but it will be on **His** terms and requires real change, not merely empty words. So the waiting continued. The grieving **Husband** waited with expectation, but not without repentance.

Will your wrath continue forever? This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can (3:5b). The prophet **appeals to Judah to acknowledge YHVH even at this late hour, and give the assurance that He will surely not stay angry forever. Yet even as God makes this appeal, He sadly adds over and over again that the people have demonstrated their persistent wickedness.** **Y'hudah** is not moved and does not change. **She** had **left her first love** (see the commentary on **Revelation Az - The Church at Ephesus**).