

CHAPTER 3

God is still by the prophet inculcating the same thing upon this careless people, and much in the same manner as before, by a type or sign, that of the dealings of a husband with an adulterous wife. In this chapter we have,

- I. The bad character which the people of Israel now had; they were, as is said of the Athenians (^{<4476>}Acts 17:16), “wholly given to idolatry,” (v. 1).
- II. The low condition which they should be reduced to by their captivity, and the other instances of God's controversy with them (v. 2-4).
- III. The blessed reformation that should at length be wrought upon them in the latter days (v. 5).

^{<300>}HOSEA 3:1-5

IDOLATRY OF ISRAEL

Some think that this chapter refers to Judah, the two tribes, as the adulteress the prophet married (^{<300>}Hosea 1:3) represented the *ten tribes*; for this was not to be divorced, as the ten tribes were, but to be left desolate for a long time, and then to return, as the two tribes did. But these are called the *children of Israel*, which was the ten tribes, and therefore it is more probable that of them this parable, as well as that before, is to be understood. *Go*, and repeat it, says God to the prophet; *Go yet again*. Note, For the conviction and reduction of sinners it is necessary that precept be upon precept, and line upon line. If they will not believe one sign, try another, (^{<2048>}Exodus 4:8, 9. Now,

- I. In this parable we may observe,
 1. God's goodness and Israel's badness strangely serving for a foil to each other, v. 1. Israel is as a woman *beloved of her friend*, either of him that has married her or of him that only courts her, and *yet an adulteress*; such is the case between God and Israel. We say of those whose affection is mutual that there is *no love lost* between them; but here we find a great deal of the love even of God himself lost and thrown away upon an

unworthy ungrateful people. The God of Israel retains a very great love for the *children of Israel*, and yet they are an evil and adulterous generation. *Be astonished, O heavens! at this, and wonder, O earth!*

(1.) That God's goodness has not put an end to their badness; the Lord loves them, has a kindness for them, and is continually showing kindness to them; they know it, they cannot but own it, that he has been as a friend and Father to them; and yet they *look to other gods*, gods that they can see, and to the love of which they are drawn by the eye; they look to them with an eye of adoration (they offer up all their services to them) and with an eye of dependence (they expect all their comforts from them); if they were restrained from bowing the knee to idols, yet they gave them an amorous glance, and had *eyes full of that spiritual adultery*. And they loved *flagons of wine*; they joined with idolaters because they lived merrily and drank hard; they had a kindness for *other gods* for the sake of the plenty of good wine with which they had been sometimes treated in their temples. Idolatry and sensuality commonly go together; those that make a god of their belly, as drunkards do, will easily be brought to make a god of any thing else. God's priests were to *drink no wine* when they went in to minister, and his Nazarites none at all. But the worshippers of other gods *drank wine in bowls*; nay, no less than *flagons of wine* would content them.

(2.) That their badness had not stopped the current of his favours to them. This is a wonder of mercy indeed, that she is thus *beloved of her friend, though an adulteress*; such is the *love of the Lord towards the children of Israel*. "Go," says God, "*love such a woman; see if thou canst find in thy heart to do it. No, thou canst not, the breast of no man would admit such a love; yet such is my love to the children of Israel; it is love to the loveless, to the unlovely, to those that have a thousand times forfeited it.*" Note, In God's goodwill to poor sinners his thoughts and ways are infinitely above ours, and his love is more condescending and compassionate than ours is, or can be; in this, as much as any thing, he is *God, and not man*, ^{<310>}Hosea 11:9.

2. The method found for the bringing of a God so very good and a people so very bad together again; this is the thing aimed at, and what God aims at he will accomplish. To our great surprise, we find a breach thus wide as the sea effectually healed; miracles cease not so long as divine mercy does not cease. Observe here,

(1.) The course God takes to humble them and make them know themselves (v. 2): *I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and a homer and a half of barley*, that is, I courted her to be reconciled, to leave her ill courses, and return to her first husband, as ^{<3014>}Hosea 2:14. I *allured* her, and *spoke comfortably* to her; as the *Levite who went after his concubine that had played the harlot* from him, and had run away with another man, *spoke friendly to her*, ^{<0719>}Judges 19:3. But here the present which the prophet brought her for the purchasing of her favour is observed to be a very small one; but it was all that was intended for her separate maintenance, and in it she is reduced to a short allowance, and, to punish her for her pride, is made to look very mean. When Samson went to be reconciled to his wife that had disobliged him he *visited her with a kid* (^{<0731>}Judges 15:1), which was a genteel entertainment. But the prophet here visited his wife with *fifteen pieces of silver*, a small sum, which yet she must be content to live upon a great while, so long as till her husband thought fit to restore her to her first estate. She shall also have *a homer and a half of barley*, for bread-corn, and that is all she must expect till she be sufficiently humbled, and, by a competent time of trial, satisfactory proof given that she is indeed reformed. Let her be made sensible that it is not for her own merit that her husband makes court to her; it is but a lame price that he values her at. The price of a servant was thirty shekels, ^{<0213>}Exodus 21:32. This was but half so much; yet let her know that it is more than she is worth. God had given Egypt for Israel's ransom once, so precious were they then in his sight, and so honourable, ^{<2318>}Isaiah 43:3, 4. But now that they have gone a whoring from him he will give but fifteen pieces of silver for them, so much have they lost in their value by their iniquity. Note, Those whom God designs honour and comfort for he first makes sensible of their own worthlessness, and brings them to acknowledge, with the prodigal, *I am no more worthy to be called thy son*. Time was when Israel was *fed with the finest of the wheat*, but they grew wanton, *and loved flagons of wine*, and therefore, in order to the humbling and reducing of them, they must be brought in the land of their captivity to eat barley-bread, and be thankful they can get it, and to eat that too by weight and measure, whereas they did not use to be stinted. Note, Poverty and disgrace sometimes prove a happy means of making great sinners true penitents.

(2.) The new terms upon which God is willing to come with them (v. 3): *Thou shalt abide for me many days, and shalt not be for another, so will I*

be for thee. He might justly have given them a bill of divorce, and have resolved to have no more to do with them; but he is willing to show them kindness, and that the matter should be compromised; he deals not with them in strict justice, according to the rigour of the law, but according to the multitude of his mercies; and it represents God's gracious dealings with the apostate race of mankind, that had gone a whoring from him; he bought them indeed with an inestimable price, not for their honour, but for the honour of his own justice; and now this is the proposal he makes to them, the covenant of grace he is willing to enter into with them — they must be to him a people, and he will be to them a God, the same with the proposal here made to Israel.

[1.] They must take to themselves the shame of their apostasy from him, must submit to, and accept of, the punishment of their iniquity: *Thou shalt abide for me many days in solitude and silence*, as a widow that is *desolate* and in sorrow; they must *lay aside their ornaments*, and wait with patience and submission to know what God will do with them, and whether he will please to admit such unworthy wretches into his favour again, as they did ^{<0334>}Exodus 33:4, 5. *Their father*, their husband, has *spit in their face* (as God said concerning Miriam), has put them under the marks of his displeasure, and therefore, like her, they must be *ashamed seven days*, and be *shut out of the camp* (^{<0424>}Numbers 12:14), till *their uncircumcised hearts be humbled*, ^{<0344>}Leviticus 26:41. Let them *sit alone* and *keep silence, waiting for the salvation of the Lord*, and in the mean time let them *bear the yoke*, ^{<0386>}Lamentations 3:26-28. Let them not expect that God should speedily return in mercy to them; no, let them want it, let them wait for it *many days*, during all the days of their captivity, and reckon it a miracle of mercy, and well worth waiting for, if it come at last. Note, Those whom God designs mercy for he will first bring to abase themselves and to put a high value upon his favours.

[2.] They must never return to folly again; that is the condition upon which God will *speak peace to his people and to his saints* (^{<0388>}Psalms 85:8), and no other. “*Thou shalt not play the harlot, shalt not worship idols in the land of thy captivity, while thou art there set apart for the uncleanness.*” Note, It is not enough to take shame to ourselves for the sins we have committed, and to justify God in correcting us for them, but we must resolve, in the strength of God's grace, that we will not offend any more, that we will not again go a whoring from God, after the world and the flesh. Blessed be God, though it is the law of the covenant, it is not the

condition of it that we shall never in any thing do amiss: “But thou shalt not *play the harlot*; thou shalt not serve other gods, *shalt not be for another man*.” In the land of their captivity they would be courted to worship the idols of the country; that would be a trial for them, a *long* trial, many days: “But if thou keep thy ground, and hold fast thy integrity, if, when *all this comes upon thee*, thou dost not *stretch out thy hand to a strange god*, thou wilt be qualified for the returns of God's favour.” Note, It is a certain sign that our afflictions are means of much good to us, and earnest of more, when we are kept by the grace of God from being overcome by the temptations of an afflicted state.

[3.] Upon these terms their Maker will again be their husband: *So will I also be for thee*. This is the covenant between God and returning sinners, that, if they will be for him to serve him, he will be for them to save them. Let them renounce and abjure all rivals with God for the throne in the heart, and devote themselves entirely to him and him only, and he will be to them a God all-sufficient. If we be faithful and constant to God in a way of duty, and will never leave nor forsake him, he will be so to us in a way of mercy, and will never leave nor forsake us. And a fairer proposal could not be made.

II. In the last two verses we have the interpretation of the parable and the application of it to Israel.

1. They must long *sit like a widow*, stripped of all their joys and honours, ^{<200>}Lamentations 4:1, 2. *They shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince*; and a nation in this condition may well be called a *widow*. They want the blessing,

(1.) Of civil government: They shall abide *without a king*, and *without a prince*, of their own. There were kings and princes over them to oppress them and rule them with rigour, but they had no king nor prince to protect them, to fight their battles for them, to administer justice to them, and to take care of their common safety and welfare. Note, Magistracy is a very great blessing to a people, and it is a sad and sore judgment to want it.

(2.) Of public worship: *They shall abide without a sacrifice*, and *without an image* (or a *statue*, or *pillar*; the word is used concerning the pillars Jacob erected, ^{<200>}Genesis 28:18; 31:45; 35:20), and *without an ephod and teraphim*. The *teraphim* being here closely joined to the *ephod*, some thing the *urim* and *thummim* were meant by it in the breast-plate of the high

priest. The meaning is that in their captivity they should not only have no face of a nation upon them, but no face of a church; they should not have (as a learned expositor speaks) liberty of any public profession or exercise of religion, either true or false, according to their choice. They shall have *no sacrifice or altar* (so the Septuagint), and therefore no sacrifice because no altar. They shall have *no ephod*, nor *teraphim*, no legal priesthood, no means of knowing God's mind, no oracle to consult in doubtful cases, but shall be all in the dark. Note, The case of those is very melancholy that are deprived of all opportunities to worship God in public. This was the case of the Jews in their captivity; and it is so far the case of the scattered Jews at this day that, though they have their synagogues, they have no temple-service. Desolate indeed is their condition that are shut out from communion with God, that have no opportunity of directing their addresses to God by sacrifice and altar, and of receiving instruction from him by ephod and teraphim.

2. They shall at length be received again as a wife (v. 5): *Afterwards*, in process of time, when they have gone through this discipline, *they shall return*, that is, they shall repent of their idolatries and forsake them, they shall apply themselves to God and adhere to him, and herein they shall be accepted of him. Two things are here promised as instances of their return, and steps towards their acceptance with God in their return: —

(1.) The enquiries they shall make after God: *They shall seek the Lord their God, and David their king*. Note, Those that would find God, and find favour with him, must seek him, must ask after him, covet acquaintance with him, desire to be reconciled to him, set their love on him, and labour in this that they may be accepted of him. Their seeking him implies that they had lost him, that they were lamenting their loss, and that they were solicitous to retrieve what they had lost. They shall seek him as *their God*; for *should not a people seek unto their God?* And they shall seek *David their King*, who can be no other than the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the *root and offspring of David*, whom David himself called *Lord* (⁴⁹⁰Psalm 110:1), and to whom God gave the *throne of his father David*, (⁴¹³Luke 1:32. The Chaldee reads it, *They shall seek the service of the Lord their God, and shall obey Messiah, the Son of David their king*. Compare this with ²⁸⁰Jeremiah 30:9; ²⁸³Ezekiel 34:23; 37:25. Note, Those that would seek the Lord so as to find him must apply to Jesus Christ, and must seek to him as their King,

and become his willing people, and take an oath of fealty and allegiance to him.

(2.) The reverence they shall have of God: *They shall fear the Lord and his goodness*. Some by his *goodness* here understand the temple, towards which they shall look, in worshipping God. The Jews say, There were three things which Israel cast off in the days of Rehoboam — the *kingdom of heaven*, the *family of David*, and the *house of the sanctuary*; and it will never be well with them till they return, and seek them all three, which is here promised. They shall seek the kingdom of heaven in *the Lord their God*, the royal family in *David their King*, and the temple in *the goodness of the Lord*. Others by *his goodness* understand Christ, the same with *David their King*. But it is rather to be taken for that attribute of God which he showed as his glory, and by which he proclaimed his name. Note, It is not only the Lord and his greatness that we are to fear, but the Lord and his goodness, not only his majesty, but his mercy. They shall *flee for fear to the Lord and his goodness* (so some take it), shall flee to it as their city of refuge. We must *fear God's goodness*, that is, we must admire it, and stand amazed at it, must adore it, and *worship* as Moses did at the proclaiming of this name, ^{<B346>}Exodus 34:6. We must be afraid of offending his goodness, of making any ungrateful returns for it, and so forfeiting it. *There is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared*, ^{<B304>}Psalm 130:4. We must *rejoice with trembling* in the goodness of God, must not be *high-minded, but fear*. Now this promise had its accomplishment when by the gospel of Christ great multitudes both of Jews and Gentiles were brought home to God, and incorporated in the New-Testament church, served God in Christ, with a filial fear of divine grace, and were accepted of God as his Israel. And some think it is to be yet further accomplished in the conversion of those Jews to the faith of Christ who shall remain in unbelief, when they shall seek their Messiah as *David their King*, and by him *all Israel shall be saved*, when the *fulness of the Gentiles is brought in*. Time was when they sought him to put him to death, saying, *We have no king but Caesar*; but the day is coming when they shall seek him to *appoint him their head*, and to lay their necks under his yoke. He that has here promised that they shall do it will enable them to do it, and bring about this great work in his own way and time, *in the latter days* of the *last times*, the times of the Messiah: but, alas! who shall live when God does this? How far we are to expect a general conversion of that nation I cannot say; but I am sure we ought to pray that the Jews may be converted.