



GOD'S DIVORCE OF ISRAEL

Many have family members whose marriages have ended up in divorce. Many have close friends who have experienced divorce. Churches are full of people who have experienced divorce. With all the divorces that have taken place throughout all eternity past, who is the most prominent divorcee of all eternity? A very brief study of Jeremiah 3 shows that God has experienced divorce. What is more, He initiated it! He did not suffer willingly and stay content in His marital state for the grace of God as many pastors today counsel their members to do. When Israel did something that was grounds for divorce, God divorced Israel. This is found in Jeremiah 3:6-8:

- 6 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, ***Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she*** is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there ***hath played the harlot.***
- 7 And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it.
- 8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding ***Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce;*** yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.

God shows His relationship with Israel as a marriage relationship. Israel, according to verse 6, played the harlot. In verse 7, God gave His bride a second chance, a chance to repent and “turn back to me”. Israel did not turn back, and for Israel’s adultery, God did exactly as His Law instructed concerning a husband whose wife no longer has favor in the eyes of her husband. He gave her a bill of divorce and put her away. We are compelled to notice that “put away” (*shalach*) and “bill of divorce” (*keriythuwth*) are two separate and distinct things. If they were one and the same, then what God did in verse 8 was:

“And I say, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I divorced her and divorced her;”

Or it might read this way:

“And I say, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had given her a bill of divorce and gave her a bill of divorce;”

Instead, God Himself shows that they are two separate and distinct things.

But what do we now make of these verses? That God is a divorced person! Yes, God is divorced! He has admitted it. He is unrepentant. Is He then disqualified from being God?

It is worth consideration that God’s marriage to Israel is a marriage in the “spiritual realm,” and not a “physical marriage” as between two humans. However, the fact that God was married to Israel in the spiritual realm makes it even more meaningful. God refers to His relationship with Israel and Christ’s with the church as marriages because the earthly

marriage relationship is as close to spiritual absolutes that man may experience while still in the flesh. God's love for Israel is the ultimate example of a marital love. In human physical marriages, mankind is to strive to follow that example, and that is truly what God's marriage relationship with Israel is: an example for mankind to follow in our physical marriages. We are to strive to love as deeply as God did. However, we also are free to follow God's example if our spouse breaks the marriage covenant like Israel did. It is never wrong to follow God's example, and never wrong to obey His Word, whether that rattles prejudices and preconceived notions or not. Since God is the supreme example and role model for mankind, it is pertinent to note that He broke the relationship when His spouse, Israel, so broke the marriage contract.

While the position could be taken that God's divorce from Israel is still unclear, we would reply that it is only unclear if prejudices and preconceived notions are getting in the way of a clear reading of God's Word. When God divorced Israel, it was over.

Many times a church member will come to their pastor for marriage counseling when their spouse has been unfaithful or broken the marriage vows in other ways. Many pastors tell them that they may not divorce, because it is a sin and if they ever remarried they would be adulterers. If God would have come to many pastors today for counsel, and told the pastor that His wife had broken the marriage contract, we wonder what those pastors would have told God? If they are consistent, they would have told God that He must not give Israel a bill of divorce, for if He did, it would be a sin.

One has no recourse but to conclude that if God refers to Himself as divorced, there are times when divorce is not wrong for His children.

As mentioned previously, there are 23,214 verses within the Old Testament. We do not find even one that forbids divorce (*keriythuwth*). Not one! It is also notable that we do not find even one verse that forbids remarriage for someone who has been given a bill of divorce.

This article was written by Kim Johnson. Kim was a pastor's wife, married for 21 years when her husband left her for their church secretary. Divorced with two teenage daughters, she worked to heal and kept her eyes on the Lord. She is now remarried (for 16 years) with a blended family of four adult children and seven grandchildren. She and her husband lead the divorce recovery ministry at Friends Church Yorba Linda.