

Was God wrong in Jeremiah 3:7 when he said he thought Israel would return but they didn't?

God told Jeremiah to buy a linen belt and bury it. He would dig it up at a later time (Jer 13:1-6). After retrieving the belt, it had become mildewed and useless (v. 7). The point was that God would rot and ruin Judah because of their pride (vv. 8-14). Jeremiah in vain invited them to return to God (vv. 15-22); but, their disease was terminal and their destruction sure (vv. 23-27).¹

Regarding these passages² R. K. Harrison wrote:

This section is closely connected with the preceding verses, pointing out that Israel had been put away for her apostasy. Judah had apparently not learned from this tragic experience, and was even more guilty than her sister-state.³

God's hope that Israel would return to him had proved vain.

It's never wrong for God or for men to hope. The apostle Paul wrote: [Love] ...bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things [and] endures all things (1 Co 13:7, NKJV).

God will give men every chance to repent because of his lovingkindness (Ps 63:3; 69:16) and long-suffering (Ex 34:6) for them. Still, men have a will and can turn their back on him (Ge 2:17) if they choose (Josh 24:15, Mt 12:30).

Israel⁴ has a long history of turning toward God and then away from him again.⁵ It would appear that God wanted the world to know when Israel was in his good graces and when she was not. Indeed, the world has been witness to her many punishments.⁶ Still, she is God's love—the apple of his eye; so, nations would do well not to come against her (Zech 2:8).

God is able to work around man's will. When Israel was cut off for rejecting her Messiah⁷, he grafted in the gentiles.⁸ God continues to turn evil into good for those who love him (Ro 8:28). His people will once again have the opportunity to respond rightly toward him.⁹ Israel's present rejection is not final (Ro 11:11a, 26–36).

¹ Willmington, H. L. (1999). *The Outline Bible* (Je 12:15–13:27). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² 3:6–18. The guilt of two sisters, Israel and Judah.

³ Harrison, R. K. (1973). *Jeremiah and Lamentations: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 21, p. 68). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

⁴ Descendants of Jacob (Gen. 49:16, 28).

⁵ The sins of Israel include: idolatry (Hos. 13:1–4), hypocrisy (Is. 1:11–14), disobedience (Jer. 7:22–28), externalism (Matt. 23:1–33), unbelief (Rom. 11:1–31), works—righteousness (Phil. 3:4–9). Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1996). *Nelson's quick reference topical Bible index* (pp. 325–326). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

⁶ Punishments upon Israel in world history have included: defeat (Lev. 26:36–38), curses upon (Deut. 28:15–46), captivity (Judg. 2:13–23), destruction (Luke 19:42–44), dispersion (Deut. 4:26–28), blindness (Rom. 11:25), forfeiture of blessings (Acts 13:42–49), replaced by Gentiles (Rom. 11:11–20). *Ibid* p. 326.

⁷ Some of the original branches have been broken off, referring to unbelieving Jews (Ro 11:17a). *Ibid* (Ro 11:17).

⁸ Now some branches from a wild olive tree have been grafted in, referring to believing Gentiles (11:17b–23). *Ibid* (Ro 11:17–23).

⁹ The once-removed original branches will someday be grafted back in, referring to the future repentant Israel (11:24). *Ibid* (Ro 11:24).