

“Broken Cisterns”

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water,” Jer.2:13.

The preceding verse figuratively describes the actions of God’s people (Judah) during the time of Jeremiah, a faithful prophet. Jeremiah labored as a prophet from the 13th year of the reign of Josiah to the end *“of the eleventh year of Zedekiah...until the carrying away of Jerusalem captive...”* (Jer. 1:2-3). This means that Jeremiah served as a prophet after the northern Kingdom (Israel) was carried away into Assyrian Captivity (I Kings 17), and even to *“the carrying away of Jerusalem captive”* (Jer. 1:1), or to the beginning of the 70-year Babylonian Captivity of the Southern Kingdom, Judah (2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36; Jer. 52).

Jeremiah was a faithful prophet of God. He labored for more than 40 years proclaiming a message of warning and doom to the stiff-necked people of Judah, who consistently rejected his message. The people of Judah had *“forsaken”* God, *“burned incense to other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands”* (Jer. 1:16). Their *“rulers... transgressed against”* God, the false prophets *“prophesied by Baal”* (Jer. 2:8), they had forgotten God *“days without number”* (Jer. 2:32), the people were guilty of murder, adultery, swearing falsely, burning incense to Baal and walking *“after other gods”* (Jer. 7:9). Deceit and lying were common place (Jer. 9:3-6), and their leaders (*“shepherds”*) had become *“dull-hearted,”* and had *“not sought the Lord”* (Jer. 10:21).

Much more could be said about the idolatry and immorality of God’s people (Judah), but enough has been said to confirm what God said of them in our opening text: *“My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns — **broken cisterns** that can hold no water”* (Jer. 2:13).

In Bible lands a cistern was an artificial reservoir which was hewn in the rock or dug in the earth for collecting and storing water. They served a very useful purpose in areas where a consistent water supply was lacking, and they made it possible to store water for good use when the rainfall was lacking. However, cisterns (useful as they were) were a poor substitute for a continuous supply of pure, fresh, sparkling water. And *“broken”* cisterns were completely useless!

“Cistern” (the word) is used in two senses in the Bible — in a literal sense, as in 2 Kings 18:31, and a figurative sense, as in Prov. 5:15-18; Jer. 2:13. It is used figuratively in our text wherein God described Himself as *“the fountain of living waters”* and said of His people that they have *“hewn themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water”* (Jer. 2:13). Try (if you can) to imagine the irony of a people forsaking *“the fountain of living waters”* and then hewing out for themselves *“broken cisterns that can hold no water!”* How utterly stupid! For Judah, God had indeed been a *“fountain of living waters.”* He delivered His people from Egyptian bondage (Jer. 2:6). He led them

through the wilderness, preserving their lives against all odds, and brought them “into a bountiful country” (Jer. 2:7)., Figuratively, God had planted His people as “noble vine, a seed of highest quality,” but who turned themselves “into the degenerate plant of an alien vine,” and were also likened to “a wild donkey” in the wilderness sniffing “at the wind in her desire; in her time of mating” which could not be turned away (Jer. 2:23-24). Indeed, so many metaphors were used to describe apostate Judah in the time of Jeremiah. Suffice it to say, they had forsaken God “the fountain of living waters,” and had hewn for “themselves cisterns — broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer. 2:13).. Is it any wonder that they suffered the consequences of their own actions, reaped what they had sown as a nation (cf. Gal. 6:7), and were carried away captive into Babylon for 70 long years?

In reflecting upon the actions of the nation of Israel which amounted to forsaking God, hewing out broken cisterns that could hold no water, and the captivity which followed, it is difficult to not be concerned about our own nation. America was never perfect (no nation is), but it was founded upon the premise that we are a “nation under God.” Its founders envisioned a nation where “freedom of religion” (not freedom from religion!) would prevail. But we, as a nation, are turning from “the fountain of living waters” and are hewing out the “broken cisterns” of Secularism, Post Modernism, Secular Humanism, etc. Consequently, it seems that every form of deviancy is upheld, Christianity is ridiculed, and many are ready to label any Bible verse which condemns immorality as “hate speech!” A conscientious Christian (who is also a student of history) has reason to wonder, “how long will God continue to bless America!”

However, that having been said, it now behooves us to make proper application of the “broken cisterns” metaphor. Properly understood, **Jesus** is our fountain of living waters. He told the woman at the well that “whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become to him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life” (John 4:14). On one occasion Jesus said “if anyone thirsts let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38). Jesus is indeed the prophesied “fountain” that was opened “for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech. 13:1), and by following Him we can one day drink eternally of that “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1). In view of what awaits faithful Christians, one wonders why would any child of God forsake the “fountain of living waters” and hew out “broken cisterns...that can hold no water!” However, such occurred in the first century and it is still continuing!

Some Modern “Broken Cisterns”

1. Exchanging the Bible for human creeds! The Bible was given “by inspiration of God,” and it enables “the man of God” to be “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work,” 2 Tim. 3:16-17. And dire consequences will come to those who add to or take from God’s word (Rev. 22:18-19), or pervert it in any way (2 John 9-11). Nevertheless, the world is awash with uninspired, man-made catechisms, creeds, manuals, church disciplines, etc., all of which are condemned by God! These are nothing less than “broken cisterns which can hold no water.”

2. Rejecting the church Jesus built for churches built by man! Jesus built His church (Matt. 16:18); He purchased it with His “Own blood” (Acts 20:28), to it the “saved” are added

(Acts 2:47), in it both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled unto God (Eph. 2:16), and of it Jesus is the “*Savior*” (Eph, 5:23). All man-made churches are plants which our “*heavenly Father has not planted*” and which will be “*uprooted*” in that last day. Figuratively, they are “*broken cisterns...which can hold no water.*”

3. Rejecting Jesus for Allah. Jesus, not Allah, is that “last great prophet.” He is the One of whom “*the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms*” spoke (Luke 24:44). He is “*the Son of the Living God*” (Matt. 16:18), and no one can come to the “*Father except through*” Him (John 14:6). Jesus never committed one sin (Heb. 4:15), whereas Allah was a child molester, adulterer, bigamist, and murderer! Figuratively, he is a “*broken cistern, that can hold no water.*”

4. There are countless other “*broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*” They appear in the form of sinful pleasure, covetousness, alcoholism, drug use and abuse, and immorality of every conceivable form. One Chaplain summed up “*broken cisterns*” under the acronym SAM, which stands for sex (illicit), Alcohol, and Materialism.

Conclusion: We must turn away **from** all “*broken cisterns*” and turn **back to** Jesus and to His word. Jesus is that “*fountain of living water*” (John 4:10,14). He promises us that “*water of life*” which flows freely from the throne of God (Rev. 22:1). Why would any sane person reject the “*fountain of living water*” for some man-made “broken cistern that can hold no water?”

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