

THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

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Jeremiah's America, # 2

SUBJECT: REJECTING GOD

TITLE: BROKEN CISTERNS

TEXT: JEREMIAH 2:13

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.”

INTRODUCTION. There are some beautiful expressions in the Bible. There are some glorious claims throughout its pages. There are wondrous promises. There are also some sad statements. For example, I think one of the saddest lines I have ever read are the words, “Rachel weeping for her children.” Don’t ask me why, it just is. There are others that are almost as sad. Apart from the warnings of eternal punishment for the unredeemed, I can think of no more disturbing words in the Bible than the indictment in our text: *“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.”*

In Chapter One, God revealed through Jeremiah that there was a boiling pot leaning away from the north - divine judgment was about to be poured out upon a rebellious people because they had rejected Him. That judgment would come in the form of an invasion by Babylon. God had used Assyria to judge and destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and to punish Judah, the Southern Kingdom. After the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Judah would reclaim the name Israel for itself. The Lord announced that when He finished with Assyria He would snap her power as one snaps a twig between his fingers. He did that in what we call the Sennacherib Crisis of 701 B. C. when the death angel of the Lord moved through the camp of Sennacherib, leaving one hundred, eighty-five thousand soldiers dead. Sennacherib returned to Ninevah without moving against Judah as he had intended, before invading Egypt.

God had announced that He would raise up Babylon to judge Judah. Judah would not be destroyed as Israel had been destroyed at the hands of the bloody Assyrians, when they were conquered by Sargon II and deported in 722 B. C. Judah would go into captivity for seventy years and then a remnant, purged of idolatry, would be returned to continue in a covenant relationship with the Lord. The question is, why would God do this to His Chosen People? He provides the answer.

I. ISRAEL WAS GUILTY OF TWO EVILS, JEREMIAH 2:13.

A. Israel Had Forsaken the Fountain of Living Waters.

In the first place, God is the fountain of living waters. In the New Testament, Jesus is the source of the water of life:

“Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost” (Rev. 21:6).

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22:1-2).

These ancient Israelites had ready and continuous access to the fountains of living water, but they deliberately turned away, forsaking their only hope of life. Do not take lightly the words, “They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters.” They could not plead ignorance for they had deliberately forsaken the source of eternal life.

Call it what you will, a decline, a drift, a turning away, apathy, or as in today’s jargon, a step onto a slippery slope. Call it what you will, the evil of which God is speaking through Jeremiah is that of forsaking God. Make no mistake about it, forsaking, neglecting, or even postponing a commitment to the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer is nothing less than evil. They were guilty of apostasy, and that without excuse.

God had called Abraham out of the land of the Chaldees and told him to go to a Promised Land far away. He entered a covenant with Abraham in which He promised him a son, many descendants, a land (which his descendants still occupy), and one Descendant, Who would be a blessing to all nations. That Descendant, by the way, is both the Bread of Life and the Water of Life - the Living Water.

God had chosen these descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (whose name He changed to Israel). God had provided a place for His chosen people in the fertile land of Goshen when they were but a small tribe, seventy in number. Four hundred years later, He delivered a nation of two million people by His mighty hand. He had parted the waters of the Red Sea so that they could cross on dry land. He let the water collapse upon the Egyptian army when they pursued them. He had led them to Sinai where he entered a covenant relationship with them. Miraculously, He provided food and water for them in the wilderness. When they refused to follow Him into the Promised Land He caused them to wander in the wilderness until all who were twenty years of age and older were dead, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, the faithful spies.

When the time was right, God miraculously parted the waters of the Jordan River and commanded them to enter the land to possess their possessions. During the Conquest of Canaan, he blessed them and provided for them. However, they disobeyed Him by not driving out all the pagan peoples and purging the land of idolatry.

For the next four hundred years, God sought to be their King, but they constantly rejected Him, turning again and again to idolatry. They went through the same cycle over and over:

- 1) They rebelled and turned to false gods,
- 2) God raised up an enemy to judge them and they were severely oppressed,
- 3) They cried out to God for deliverance,
- 4) He send a judge (like Samson, Gideon, or Deborah) to deliver them, and
- 5) They lived in peace as long as that judge lived.

Then they started the same cycle over again. God gave them every reason to obey Him and serve Him, but they had continually rejected the fountain of living water. Surely, those must have been some really dumb people, right? They were sinning, but they were sinning against much less light than Americans today.

B. They Had Hewn for Themselves Broken Cisterns.

We are very fortunate in having safe drinking water in most places in America. In ancient world, water was always a major consideration. The first concern for settlers was the availability of water. Throughout history people settled around rivers, creeks, and lakes. Safe drinking water was the first consideration, and after that, water for livestock, water for bathing, washing clothes, and for irrigation. Ancients dug wells and hewed out cisterns (some were coated with plaster). The cisterns would be filled by rain during the rainy seasons, and at other times they could be filled from whatever supply was available. The water would become brackish, but it would sustain life when the well ran dry.

I remember having to stay with a great aunt, Aunt Effie, when my father was drafted toward the end of the Second World War. One of my chores was drawing water from the well and filling the water bucket and taking it into the kitchen. I would also water pets and the cow and calf she had at the time. My parents were working at a shipyard in Mobile until my father became one of the older men drafted toward the end of the war. Our farm had been rented out and we could not move back to our home for several months, so Mother and James stayed with her sister and I stayed with Aunt Effie, who had help raise my father after his father's death.

When we were able to move home - from the Mississippi hills to the delta - I was introduced to the number three pitcher pump, a red pump with a long handle. Farmers simply drove a pump point down with pipe attached and at about fifteen feet they would hit a good supply of water. I spent a good part of my childhood pumping water for home use as well as for all the livestock.

While visiting someone in the Mississippi hill country I discovered that these people had a cistern. In this case it was a tank located beside the house with a gutter running along the edge of the roof to channel the rain water into the cistern. The thought of drinking that water - well, I still don't want to think about it. I lost my desire for water somewhere between the trash, tadpoles and insects. Of course, they may have been saving that water for an emergency supply for livestock, but I was never sure.

You can imagine the problem the ancient Israelite would have after spending days, or even weeks, hewing out a cistern from a huge rock, only to discover that there was a crack in it and it would hold no water. In ancient Israel, a good cistern would have been essential for many of the people. The brackish water could have been purified by mixing the water with wine, usually they mixed three parts water to one part wine.

The Lord had Jeremiah tell the people of Israel that they were facing His judgment because of the two evils: (1) rejecting Him, the fountain of living water, and (2) hewing out broken cisterns that could hold no water. How had they hewn these broken cisterns? Throughout the entire period of the Judges they had turned over and over to the Canaanite gods, some turning totally from the true God, but I am sure many thought they could combine what they liked best from pagan religions with their worship of the Yahweh, the One true God.

What was the great appeal of those pagan religions? There are three sources of temptation: Satan, the world, and the flesh. Satan gave a certain power and credence to pagan religions - after all, he is the founder of all the religions of the world. The Southern Baptist Interfaith Witness Department learned years ago that one reason many young people turn to the occult is that they see in it a demonstration of power they are not seeing in their church. Satan will try to convince people that these pagan religions are superior to Christianity. The world tells us that since everyone else is doing it, there must be something to it. In ancient times many of the pagan religions were actually fertility cults in which worshipers sought, through immorality, to stimulate the gods to bless them with a bountiful harvest - or maybe that was just their excuse for drunken orgies. Satan used sex, occult power, superstition, and every argument the world can come up with to seduce those ancient Israelites in order to get them to hew for themselves broken cisterns that could hold no water.

They continually turned to false religion through the period of the United Kingdom, with Solomon bringing in pagan wives and permitting them to bring their religion with them. The Divided Kingdom saw the Northern Kingdom, the northern ten tribes, embrace idolatry from their inception. One king after another either permitted or promoted pagan worship. Ahab, for example, permitted Jezebel to bring her prophets and priests of Baal with her, and she spread this false religion with murderous zeal. Baal was a broken cistern, and so were all the other pagan gods of the period. Idolatry, and all the sins associated with it, led to the destruction of Israel, the northern ten tribes.

Judah knew very well why Israel had been destroyed, yet they continued to reject the true God for the "gods who are no gods." Now God was about to send them into captivity in Babylon for seventy years in order to purge them of idolatry. When they returned, they were often unfaithful, but idolatry

was not the primary sin of the nation from that day forth. Many Jews would become martyrs because they refused to compromise with pagan religions during the Inter-biblical Period and in New Testament times.

II. WE CAN FIND AMERICA IN JEREMIAH.

A. America Has Rejected the Fountain of Living Water.

First, I would like explain why I call this series Jeremiah's America. It is basically because the Book of Jeremiah is inspired Scripture, and because it has such a timely application to America today. What we read in Jeremiah is real history, dealing with real people in a real place at a real time. That history, or as much as the Lord chose to reserve for us is trustworthy. American was founded on the principles of the Word of God, but over the past fifty to seventy-five years most of our history books have been rewritten - and I am convinced that they have been written to hide the very foundation upon which this country was founded. The Pilgrims held a thanksgiving celebration, we are now told, not to thank God for His provisions and protection, but to thank the Indians for teaching the poor stupid Pilgrims how to survive in the new world. The father of our country has been denigrated and pushed aside so that we can focus on the real heroes of America - labor leaders, social innovators, and individuals like liberal entertainers, politicians, and pop stars. Letters to the editor of the local paper may vehemently deny that America was founded on biblical principles - and make it very clear that they believe those who make such claim are ignorant right wing fanatics. They cannot believe they are the ones who have been misled.

It is a fact that America was founded on Christian principles, regardless of what historical revisionists are telling us. I have read the statements of many of the founding fathers and regardless of what modern historians say, those founders told us exactly what they meant. This country and our constitution were founded on New Testament principles. Today, we are told that all those founders, and those who signed the Constitution were deists or secularists. They are quick to point to Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, who were two of the very few signers who were not dedicated Christians. The modernists never point to the others - but David Barton (WALL BUILDERS) points out Christians and tells us of their faith in Jesus Christ. David Limbaugh, in his book, PERSECUTION: HOW LIBERALS WAGE WAR AGAINST CHRISTIANITY, confirms this. These were men of great faith in God and His word.

Furthermore, it was an elderly Benjamin Franklin who called for prayer to end a stalemate during their most trying debate over various issues in drawing up the Constitution. Jefferson persuaded congress to designate and pay a chaplain and he encouraged them to send missionaries to the Indians. George Washington was a man of deep faith and great character. In his Farewell Address, which was taught to children for generations, he was very clear about his faith in the Lord. His Farewell Address has been edited to leave out any appeal to faith in God, but it was there in the original.

We are told that some congressman from that period might stand and ask for permission to speak

in congress and then proceed to read from the Bible something the Lord had placed on his heart. Then someone else might stand and say, "If that is in the Bible it ought to be in our laws," and then he would introduce a bill that would make it a part of our law. Supreme court decisions were often explained by a reference to the Bible. An intensive survey by a Texas university has proved that the Bible was the most quoted source in the writings of the founding fathers.

What this means is that the secularization of our society is a rejection of the Lord God of the Bible - America has forsaken the fountain of living waters! Don't ever let anyone tell you this nation was not founded on Christian principles (or Judeo-Christian principles). I thank God the writing of the founders have been preserved and we can know the truth. Sadly, our schools are filled with history teachers who have been taught a corrupted view of history and they continue to teach it to others. We have forsaken the fountain of living waters and hewn for ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold not water. How have we done that, and for what have we done it?

B. We Have Hewn for Ourselves Broken Cisterns that Can Hold no Water.

1. Humanism is a broken cistern.

From Adam until somewhere around the middle of the Nineteenth Century man was essentially theistic - he believed in God, a god, or many gods, but he had some kind of theistic world view. That was the world view in America until 1935 (if Francis Shaeffer was right). That, by the way was ten years after the infamous Scopes Trial in 1925 (the Monkey Trial) when the pride and power of the ACLU was pitted against the Bible. No one seems to remember that the creationists won that battle. The media treated Christians with such contempt that within ten to twenty years even professors in Christian colleges and universities were seeking some compromise position with the theory of evolution. Let us face it, if you do not have a Creator you do not need a Savior and if you have neither, surely you will never stand before a Judge to give an account.

The gospel of Humanism (which is a secular religion) is evolution, at its worst a godless, aimless evolution, based on random chance. At its worst it offers people who want to appear sophisticated and educated a compromise that lets them claim to believe the Word of God and embrace godless evolution at the same time - just call it theistic evolution. Humanists in the nineteen-seventies and eighties were telling us they wanted to rid America of the dying carcass of Christianity. The fact is, Humanism is a broken cistern that can hold no water.

2. New Age religions are a broken cistern.

Around 1990, polls showed that more people believed in God than their parents. Many Christians thought we were winning the war against secular Humanism, but that was not the case. What the polls really asked was, "Do you believe in God or a god-like force." And all the Star-Wars fans said, "Oh, Yeah, we believe in the force!" New Age religions, influenced heavily by eastern mysticism, injected Humanism with a spiritual component, but retained the humanistic moral relativism - which is the same old immorality.

The Humanist said, "There is not god." The New Ager (postmodernism is what it is being called now) said, "Of course there is a god. In fact there are many gods. If my god suits me and your god suits you we should all be happy for each other." The truth is, New Age movements (postmodernism) must be called what they are - broken cisterns that can hold no water.

3. Mormonism is a broken cistern.

There are many very dedicated young missionaries spread out across the country and around the world knocking on doors and seducing those who do not know the Word of God, and in doing so they make them "twofold more the child of hell" (Matt. 23:15) than they are themselves. I heard a brief report recently that DNA tests have proved that the claims of the Mormons about the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel are false. The Scripture proves that their whole system is based on a lie. Theirs is not the Jesus of the Bible, no matter how many copies of the King James Versions of the Bible they give away. Mormonism is a broken cistern and it can hold no water.

4. Watchtower is a broken cistern.

They use the family. They make house calls. They read from their version of the Bible - and they read that Jesus (the Logos) was "a" god. The Jehovah's Witnesses proclaim a message that can only be called a broken cistern. It can hold no water.

5. Secularism is a broken cistern.

Secularism is the "in" word today. It satisfies the Humanist who claims there is not God, but it also satisfies many others who claim they are religious or "spiritual" - but they think all things religious should be confined to the church, synagogue, or the home. The Rev. Barry Lynn and Americans United for Separation of Church and State join the ACLU in an effort to make ours a secular society - no display of the Ten Commandments, no Christmas symbols on government property, and "under God" must be removed from the Pledge. Boy Scouts cannot meet in city parks (even the ones they have founded and maintained. Secularism is a broken cistern and those who are deceived by it are not wise.

6. Islam is a broken cistern.

Immediately after the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon on nine-eleven, 2001, the dominant media began a crusade for Islam. Islam is a religion of peace, they keep telling us. Yet, when you hear that innocent citizens have been killed by a suicide murderer, is your first thought that they must have been Christians?

Islam is a broken cistern and I want you to know there are a lot of cracks in that cistern. It is built on a lie, written by a murderous, lying pedophile and in many places, spread by deceived, deluded fanatics. It was spread by the sword. They abhor immorality when they define it and can point to someone else. They call America the great Satan, but manifest the character of Satan in murderous

assaults on Israel and on Americans.

There are many Muslims who are victimized by other Muslims. The major factions in Iraq do not hesitate to kill members of another sect, but there are many Muslims who simply want an end to the violence. There are Muslims in America who are not killing Americans, but who know who among them might well have been trained in terrorism? What Muslim cleric has condemned attacks against Jews and Christians? Arab evangelist Anis Shorrosh has written that when the Muslims are in the minority they will be peaceful, but when they gain the majority, "Look out!"

Islam is responsible for deplorable conditions in countries it has controlled for centuries, yet these people come to America to take advantage of the freedom and opportunities it offers and then some of them support and encourage those who terrorists who want to bring down this country.

Thousands of black prisoners have converted to Islam in America while in jail. News reports tell us that Michael Jackson, whose trial for child molestation, was in the news for months has recently converted - from Jehovah's Witnesses to the Nation of Islam. Islam is a broken cistern and no matter how much the liberal media in America tries to fill the cracks, it will never hold water.

7. Liberalism is a broken cistern.

I sat under liberal professors when I was in seminary. I missed some more with no regrets. There was the professor who did not believe in a personal devil - no Satan. There was the professor who did not believe in hell - he preferred annihilation (like dogs and cats, we just cease to exist at death). There were the professors who felt compelled to do something with some of the miracles of the Bible. There is the old commentary that tells us that Jesus walked "toward" the water, not "on" the water; and Peter did not walk "on" the water, he waded "in" the water. Liberals have attacked the authorship of various books, denied the Creation account in Genesis, and rejected the Flood account.

When the Episcopal Church leaders voted to elect an openly homosexual priest as a bishop some of the bishops were questioned on Hannity and Colmes. Sean Hannity asked, "But what about what the Bible has to say?" One of the bishops snapped, "We do not accept the Bible as our authority." Well, something is your authority! Your authority for making change at the grocery store or paying you bills is the math (laws, formulas, or equations) that governs all transactions. We could give countless examples that prove that liberalism is a broken cistern. All you have to do is look at the denominations that embraced liberalism fifty to one hundred years ago and see where they are today.

I found an old letter (March 1, 1962) in a file folder and when I opened it I found that it was a personal letter from R. G. Lee, whom I heard often when I was growing up and later as a college and seminary student. Dr. Lee wrote, "I believe the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God - without any taint of error, personal in application, regenerative in power, inspired in totality - the miracle Book of diversity in unity, of harmony in infinite complexity." He added, "Therefore, I believe what the Bible says about the devil, Satan in Job 2." He went on in his two page letter to tell me what he believed on the authority of the Word of God.

CONCLUSION. If it is true that America, like ancient Israel has rejected God, the fountain of living waters to hew for herself broken cisterns that can hold no water, what can we do about it. What must we do? The answer for ancient Israel was Repent! The answer John the Baptist gave for the people of his day was, Repent. The answer for us today is Repent!

Now I know you and I cannot force others to repent, but we can repent for any part we may have had in rejecting the fountain of living waters. For example, how do you observe the Lord's Day? That was a major issue in ancient Israel. Today, people who are viewed as pillars of the church rush through Sunday morning services and then that the rest of the Lord's day and use it for recreation, pleasure, profit, or other things that do not come under the heading of holy.

There were moral problems in ancient Israel. We are told today that many of those who are seeking help for addiction to alcohol, drugs, gambling, and pornography are professing Christians. The family is coming apart at the seams in America and we are trying to patch it with psychology and sociology when the answer is theology.

What can we do? There is an answer - God's answer: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Let us return personally and individually right now to the fountains of living water - Jesus , the living water. Israel was given only so much time and the did not repent. We have no way of knowing how long we have, but I am convinced that we must repent right now. We must repent while there is time. "Today is the day of salvation, this is the accepted time."