

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 2:9-19

Topic

God illustrates Judah's backslide into sin as an exchange of fountain water for rainwater and run-off collected in reservoirs

Title

"The Backslide of Water"

Introduction

While coffee remains my favorite beverage, I've become a fan of the world's sparkling mineral waters.

The Italian effervescent water, San Pellegrino, is one of my favorites. It has been produced for over six hundred years. Its history can be traced to 1395 when the town borders of San Pellegrino were drawn. Leonardo da Vinci reportedly visited the town in 1509 to sample and examine the town's "miraculous" naturally carbonated water, later writing a treatise on the subject. Analysis shows that the water is strikingly similar to the samples taken in 1782, the first year such analysis took place.

Imagine my disappointment when, at a restaurant, my San Pellegrino comes served over ice! **Ice** - made from local tap water that runs through corroding metal pipes!

I don't know what you think but it's really kind of silly to order specialty water then put ice cubes in it made from, say, Hanford water. Unless, of course, the mineral you really want in your water is arsenic.

Water quality is the picture Jeremiah uses in the verses we will be reading this morning. He'll portray God as a fountain of living water whom His people have forsaken. To satisfy their thirst they look to the things in the world which Jeremiah compares to drinking the rain water and the run-off water that gathers and stagnantly pools in cisterns.

I seem to remember Jesus describing Himself as a source of living water to you and I. Might we ever forsake Him for lesser, polluted waters?

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Forsaken Remains Your Fountain, and #2 God Forsaken Appraises Your Cisterns.

#1 God Forsaken Remains Your Fountain
(v9-13)

"I'm dying of thirst" is a pretty accurate assessment of what can happen if you don't get enough water. An estimated seventy-five percent of Americans have mild but chronic dehydration. According to one source on the subject,

Water makes up more than two thirds of human body weight, and without water, we would die in a few days. The human brain is made up of 95% water, blood is 82% and lungs 90%. A mere 2% drop in our body's water supply can trigger signs of dehydration: fuzzy short-term memory, trouble with basic math, and difficulty focusing on smaller print, such as a computer screen.

Jeremiah was dispatched to the people of Judah to urge them to repent of their backslidings and to return to the Lord. Part of the message was the warning that the Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar would come and besiege Jerusalem.

The Jews believed they could withstand any siege. Not only had their kings, going back all the way to David, heavily fortified the city. There was in the city a system of reservoirs called cisterns. One researchers noted that "Jerusalem was literally honeycombed with massive cisterns that [could] hold millions of gallons of rain-water [and run-off.]"

Keep all that in mind as we listen to this next section of Jeremiah's first sermon.

Jeremiah 2:9 "Therefore I will yet bring charges against you," says the LORD, "And against your children's children I will bring charges.

The phrase translated "bring charges against you" is interesting. It can refer to a legal proceeding where someone is being charged, having the sense of an accusation. It can also be translated *to plead*.

God was definitely bringing accusations against His backslidden people but He was nevertheless pleading with them, urging them to hear Him and to turn from their sin. When He says "against your children's children I will bring charges," it indicates He is willing to plead for a long, long time.

God, as our Father, gives us more chances than we deserve. His warnings read like the parent who keeps giving their kid one more chance about ten times! Or who counts to three but doesn't follow through.

God is a pleader. We should not, however, take His pleas as a sign of inaction or of weakness. His mercy is great but His longsuffering has its limits and, for our good and His glory, He will eventually discipline us.

Jeremiah 2:10 For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see, Send to Kedar and consider diligently, And see if there has been such a thing.

Jeremiah 2:11 Has a nation changed its gods, Which are not gods? But My people have changed their Glory For what does not profit.

Picture Jeremiah pointing west toward Cyprus, then east toward Kedar, to illustrate that the Gentile nations were loyal to their 'gods' *even though they were not 'gods' at all*.

The Jews ought to have been sharing God, revealing God, to the other nations of the earth. Instead they were exchanging the living God for the false 'gods' of the Gentiles.

Why? I'm sure there are many reasons we could cite but among them is something we learn from a review of the life of Moses. In Hebrews 11:25

we are told that Moses chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”

Sin is pleasurable for a while. In fact, it’s the immediate gratification that usually gets us. While God is asking us to wait, be patient, walk by faith and believe He has a plan, the world offers us things right now that promise to satisfy.

To illustrate his point Jeremiah turns to the metaphor of water. It’s a two-edged picture because, as we said earlier, the people were trusting in their secondary water sources to save them if there was a siege. Not only was their secondary source far less satisfying, it would eventually fail them.

Jeremiah 2:12 Be astonished, O heavens, at this, And be horribly afraid; Be very desolate," says the LORD.

God calls upon creation as a witness to the stupidity of the choice His people were making. Not only was it something Gentiles refused to do, it was something that even inanimate objects in the stellar heavens would refuse to do. It’s like saying the Jews were dumber than a rock in this regard.

Jeremiah 2:13 "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.

Jeremiah likened their backsliding to willfully exchanging clear, fresh, pure fountain water for stagnant rain water and run-off.

Not only was the water collected in cisterns not fresh, the cisterns could leak. They were hewn from limestone and there was no guarantee cracks would not form allowing the water to escape. Evaporation was a problem, too.

That thing that you and I want so badly to do that God has warned us is sin... It seems at first like it will satisfy. In fact, it can seem more satisfactory than God because of the immediate pleasure it yields. But like taking a drink of stagnant water, it’s going to give us spiritual dysentery.

God holds Himself out as the fountain of living water. By the way, the Hebrew word for “prophet” is *nabi*, from a root meaning to *bubble forth, as from a fountain*.

Jesus picked-up on Jeremiah’s illustration and proclaimed Himself the source of living water, and therefore God, when He said,

John 7:37 ... "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

John 7:38 He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Earlier, to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus had offered Himself as living water:

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."

John 4:13 Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again,

John 4:14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Of the many spiritual associations we could make with water, the one the apostle John made in his gospel was this:

John 7:39 But this [Jesus] spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

God the Holy Spirit, indwelling you, coming upon you, is an endless supply of pure, living, fresh spiritual water to satisfy your deepest needs.

Or you can exchange the fountain of living water for some hewn-out cistern that you discover in the world!

Imagine yourself at a restaurant and instead of ordering San Pellegrino (without ice!) you ask your waiter to go outside and retrieve water from a puddle that had somehow formed. You wouldn't do that, right?

Start seeing the world as filled with stagnant pools that you ought not to drink from. Instead offer those in the world, who are lapping up that dead water, the real thing.

#2 God Forsaken Appraises Your Cisterns
(v14-19)

The political situation comes into play in these next verses. Notice in verse eighteen God speaks of the Jews drinking the waters of “Sihor” and “Assyria.” Sihor was a branch of the Nile River, associated with Egypt.

The Jews were seeking help, political help with military backing, from both Egypt and Assyria. Those nations were vying for power against Babylon and the Jews thought that by signing with them, by siding with them, they could be protected.

Trusting in Egypt or Assyria could not help Judah because it was God Who was orchestrating the rise of Babylon precisely on account of Judah’s backsliding!

Jeremiah 2:14 "Is Israel a servant? Is he a homeborn slave? Why is he plundered?

Jeremiah 2:15 The young lions roared at him, and growled; They made his land waste; His cities are burned, without inhabitant.

Jeremiah 2:16 Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes Have broken the crown of your head.

“Noph” and “Taphenes” were cities in Egypt. According to *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*,

[this] could refer to Pharaoh Shishak’s invasion of Judah in 925BC or to Pharaoh Neco’s killing King Josiah in 609BC. In both instances Egypt triumphed over Judah and shaved the crown of Judah’s head.

The irony of all this is that God had delivered the Jews from four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. They were no longer “servants” to Pharaoh considered his “homeborn slaves.” They had triumphed over the armies of Pharaoh with nothing more than a staff in Moses’ hand.

Not only that, these same Egyptians had recently killed her kings and plundered her. Yet to them they looked for help.

In other words, the Jews were submitting themselves to servitude to Egypt rather than trust in the living God to defend them.

The problem was that they'd have to confess. They'd have to repent. They'd have to return to the Lord. This they were unwilling to do because they loved their sin.

Jeremiah 2:17 Have you not brought this on yourself, In that you have forsaken the LORD your God When He led you in the way?

God leads you, but it is in His "way." He has a "way" for everything and you discover it by searching His written Word, the Bible. For example in the New Testament books of Colossians and Ephesians there are long, informative, insightful sections that describe the major relationships of life: husband, wife, marriage, parents, children, employers and employees. Other passages tell us how to behave in the household of faith, the church.

At home; at work; at church. That's where we live most of the time and God tells us how, shows us His way - a way of sacrifice and humility. His way will yield a reward but it is often deferred, sometimes even beyond this life, and we must trust Him, walking by faith.

The world looks at those same relationships and offers what appear to be shortcuts that promise immediate gratification. Thus are we brought to the decision: Do we drink from the cisterns of the world? Or do we rely upon the fountain of living water?

Jeremiah 2:18 And now why take the road to Egypt, To drink the waters of Sihor? Or why take the road to Assyria, To drink the waters of the River?

Allying with Egypt was bad enough. Allying with Assyria - well, that was just crazy. The Assyrians had earlier destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, dragging away the survivors with (literally) hooks in their jaws to a life of servitude.

God used the expression, “take the road.” They were choosing their own “way,” to “take the road” back to Egypt or to Assyria.

Joshua once said to the Jews, “choose you this day Whom you will serve.” We might update that and apply it and say, “choose you this moment Whom you will serve.” Moment-by-moment, day-by-day, we make choices that either keep us on the way or are the world’s road to bring us to some Egypt or Assyria we believe will satisfy us.

Jeremiah 2:19 Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing That you have forsaken the LORD your God, And the fear of Me is not in you," Says the Lord GOD of hosts.

If you were to choose stagnant, amoeba filled water over fresh, pure fountain water, you’d be choosing dysentery over health.

Yet everyday we tend to drink from the world’s cisterns. **Let the illustration sink in!**

Allow me to gross you out for a moment. I’ve compared this to amoebic dysentery.

Amoebae are parasites that are found in contaminated food or drink. They enter the body through the mouth when the contaminated food or drink is swallowed.

The amoebae are then able to move through the digestive system and take up residence in the intestine and cause an infection.

Amoebic dysentery is passed on by careless or negligent hygiene, where contaminated [water] is consumed... Salads washed with contaminated water are a common method of spread.

Symptoms include weight loss, anaemia, indigestion, intermittent diarrhea with foul-smelling stool that may be preceded by constipation, dehydration, blood and mucus in the stool, gas and abdominal bloating, abdominal cramps and tenderness, fever, fatigue, and chills.

By the way, those are listed as “**mild** early symptoms.” It can get much, much worse.

I mentioned the Samaritan woman at the well, to whom Jesus offered the living water that would satisfy her spiritual thirst. By the time she encountered Jesus, she had already been married five times and was currently living with a sixth man. She was 'thirsting' for something genuine, for a relationship that was good, but was settling for the water of the world.

Many of us can look back on our lives before encountering Jesus and recognize the foul, polluted sources we were frequenting to try to satisfy our thirst. Then He came and offered us living water!

Ah, but that's not always the end of the story. Like the Jews in Jeremiah's day, we can later exchange living water for the old stagnant pools we used to drink from. Or we might discover new stagnant pools.

Think before you drink! Back to our dysentery comparison, one medical source stated, "the incubation period is highly variable and may be even as short as a few days or as long as several months or even a year."

Just because I'm not showing symptoms of spiritual dysentery, it doesn't mean the foul waters I'm drinking from aren't affecting me and won't overwhelm me.

It's up to each of us to identify if there are any cisterns we are frequenting. Some of them may be subtle; they may be things that could be considered as liberties for some but are poison to us.

God appraised the cisterns of Judah. We should do the same.

Let's not end, however, on that note. Let's instead recall the invitations of Jesus to enjoy living water, and in endless supply.

God, forsaken, remains your fountain. One author said this:

God wants to become the living water coming into [you], enlivening [you], empowering [you], and strengthening [you] to live a life for His purpose. What is the ultimate goal of this drinking of God as living water? It is that God would have a people on earth that expresses Him fully – something that comes out of Christ and is Christ, as His full expression on the earth.

The cisterns of the world are all about our own satisfaction. But when we drink from them it makes us sick, spiritually sick.

The fountain of living water not only satisfies us, it does so by flowing through us, out from us, to others who desperately need to know God, to see Him revealed on earth.

In the story we referenced earlier, where Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, who would you be?

- Would you be the woman, continually drawing water that cannot satisfy, wasting your life seeking a fleeting personal satisfaction?
- Or would you be Jesus - the Spirit-filled man or woman offering living water?

The woman went back and affected her entire community. Let's do the same!