

A BIBLICAL STUDY ON JEREMIAH

LESSON TWENTY: JEREMIAH'S FIRST DISCOURSE

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"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." Jeremiah 2:13

While King Josiah was busy removing the physical symbols of idolatry from the land, God dispatched Jeremiah to begin working on the hearts of the people. "Go cry into the ears of Jerusalem," God directed (Jer. 2:1-2). And, so, the young prophet left his hometown of Anathoth and traveled the few miles to Jerusalem. There, in Judah's capital city, Jeremiah spoke the words that God had placed in his mouth (Jer. 1:9). In this first discourse (Jer. 2:1-3:5), God reminded the people that theirs was a covenant relationship, like that of a loving husband and wife (Jer. 2:2). In the beginning of their relationship Israel followed the Lord through the wilderness from Egypt to the Promised Land, where God provided for them abundantly. But, Israel forsook her husband, committing spiritual adultery with the gods of their neighbors (Jer. 2:2-8). "What did you find lacking in Me?" God asked (Jer. 2:5). It's a good question. God brought Israel out of slavery, where their daily existence was a misery (Ex. 1:11-14). And He took them into a bountiful land where they were free and blessed with plenty (Nu. 13:27; Deut. 1:25). He protected them from their enemies and ensured their victory in battle (Ex. 14:13-14; Josh. 6:2; 8:1). Why did they forsake Him?

Their leaders failed them and led them astray. The priests, who were tasked with instructing the people in the ways of God's Law, did not know Him themselves experientially. The kings, who were expected to shepherd God's people, rebelled against Him. Most of them worshipped false gods and led the people by example into participating in the immoral practices of their pagan neighbors. And the prophets, who were supposed to be the voice of God declaring His message to the people, were false messengers declaring the things of Baal, not Jehovah (Jer. 2:8). Therefore, God laid two charges against His unfaithful wife: 1) she broke her covenant relationship and abandoned her lawful husband; and, 2) she played the harlot with multiple useless partners (Jer. 2:13). God described Himself as "the fountain of living waters." He was the refreshing free-flowing ("living") spring waters that satisfied thirst and sustained life. Israel chose instead the broken cisterns that were unable to hold any water, so the thirsty man came away unsatisfied. Continued reliance on the empty cisterns could only lead to death.

Israel did not deserve forgiveness or a second chance from the Husband she deserted, yet God said, "I will plead with you . . . and with your children's children . . ." (Jer. 2:9). The Faithful Husband sought His wife, pleaded with her to return, wanted to bring her back into her covenant relationship where He could shower her with blessings. This is the God we serve. Not angry and vindictive, but merciful and gracious. Jesus came offering that same living water (John 4:10; 7:37-39). And those who accepted His offer were brought into a different covenant relationship, the Church. And that "living water" was revealed to be the Holy Spirit, Who indwells the Church, the Bride of Christ (John 7:39). This offer still stands. Jesus invites "whosoever will" to come to Him (Rom. 10:13).

For Israel, judgment had already begun. God had withdrawn His protection so their enemies ("young lions") attacked, laying waste to the land and burning down cities (Jer. 2:15). Instead of turning to God for help, Israel turned to Egypt and Assyria, but in vain (Jer. 2:16-19). Rather than repent, Israel denied their guilt, while the evidence, in the form of pagan temples, altars, groves, and idols, was there for all to see (Jer. 2:20-24). And this was the shame of those leaders, the priests, kings, and prophets, who not only allowed it to happen but facilitated it (Jer. 2:25-27). When they were in trouble, they prayed to their gods of wood, stone, and metal to save them (Jer. 2:27). "Let's see whether your idols can save you" God mocked (Jer. 2:28). He had attempted to correct His people over and over, but they rejected His efforts, so He rejected them (Jer. 2:29-37). Israel was in danger of being divorced from her Faithful Husband. She had played the harlot with too many lovers (Jer. 3:1). Under the Law, a man cannot remarry his divorced wife if she was married to another man after their divorce (Deut. 24:1-4; Jer. 3:1). Israel's covenant relationship with Jehovah was in jeopardy. The result of her infidelity was rampant immorality in the land (Jer. 3:2, 5). Therefore, God withheld the rain (Jer. 3:3). While He pleaded for His wife to return to Him, He warned that He would not reserve His anger forever (Jer. 3:3-5). Jehovah is not a covenant-breaking God. He remains faithful even when we ignore, turn away, or rebel against Him (II Tim. 2:13).

"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. . . ." Isaiah 55:1a