

## **BROKEN CISTERNS**

I grew up in a rural farming community in southeast Alabama working on row crop, chicken and cattle farms. During all of these years, I do not remember ever seeing a water cistern. I remember windmills, hand pump wells, freshwater springs, and city water, but never a cistern.

Not until we moved to rural Kentucky to attend seminary, had I ever seen anyone in America using a cistern as their primary water source. Because of all the rock in that part of Kentucky, few houses had water wells or city water. Instead, they had water trucks fill their cisterns on a regular basis and they had to treat the water to make it drinkable.

During my travels doing mission work around the world, I have seen many cisterns, but that is the norm in third world countries so it did not seem so strange or out of place as it did here in America. In many parts of the world, cisterns are the only option available for collecting water whether it is for drinking, cooking, washing or watering livestock.

I specifically remember one place we stayed in the mountains of Sapasoa, Peru. When the cisterns ran out of water, we didn't bathe or have a flushing toilet (such as they were). These cisterns were refilled whenever it rained from the water running off the roof. Since it was a tropical area, it usually rained often enough that with conservative use, there was adequate water. However, during this trip the area was experiencing less rainfall than normal and it was hot and humid.

On this particular day, we hadn't had a shower for some time when it began to rain really hard. We ran outside with soap in hand and started bathing under the excess that was running off the roof. Whooping and hollering we danced in the rain and the gushing flow of roof runoff—the full flow hitting our heads, we washed our faces with both hands and rinsed out our mouths. Just as we were finishing bathing and washing our hair, we looked up and noticed three large dogs staring down at us who called this roof their home. Yep! The same thoughts ran through our minds!

In Ethiopia I noticed that cisterns are often very remote and are hand dug in the rock. They are an absolute necessity as a source of water for the shepherds and their livestock during the dry seasons. These cisterns catch water from every possible source, dry creek beds, cattle trails, rock formations, etc. Just like the roof water we bathed in, these cisterns catch not only water, but also all the trash, bacteria, feces, and filth that washes in—most of which are harmful to all who partake of it.

During our current difficult times in America; the financial crisis, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, corruption in government and business, terrorist threats, and the moral decline of our culture, many of us are focused on the Presidential campaign looking for “someone” to ‘fix’ our problems and make life better. I heard on the radio yesterday that one of the latest polls showed that 82% believed the economy was the most important issue in the election.

When I look at all the godlessness and moral decline in our culture—the opposition to Biblical authority and its teachings, the rejection of God, the vagrant promotion of homosexuality, moral relativity, abortion and sexual promiscuity, it is evident to me that our country has strayed so far from the Christian ideals and from faith in a Holy God which are the foundations on which our great country was founded.

As I think about our current state of affairs, I cannot help but be reminded of the nation of Israel and the words of God spoken to them through the prophet Jeremiah. In Jeremiah chapter 2, the

Lord reminds Israel of the height from which they have fallen. They once were a nation who loved God (loved Him with the love of a new bride for her husband—vs2), and they enjoyed His provision, protection and His affection. Now they were a nation of people, of government officials, prophets and priests who neither followed Him, feared Him, or asked for His direction. They all did what was right in their own eyes and they chased after worthless idols. As a nation, they had “forsaken the Lord their God” only calling out to Him when they were in trouble (as we did on 9/11).

As a result of their rebellion and rejection of God, the Lord gave them over to their own desires. He just let them do what they wanted to do and now they were paying the price for their sin—they did not see their actions as sinful. In verses 34-35 he says, “Yet in spite of all this you say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’” They had strayed so far from God that they no longer knew Him or His will.

Look what the Lord told the people in verses 13-14: “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” Imagine the distinction between a flowing spring of pure, clean, cool, life giving water, (water that is free, is readily available to us at any time, and which always satisfies)—and the water of the cisterns from the roof runoff filled with dog urine and feces. Water from the spring sustains, heals and gives life, while water from the cistern pollutes, sickens, kills and does not satisfy. Why when given the choice, would anyone choose the latter? Yet, that is what Israel did and that is what we are doing as a nation! The very mention of God and Christian values are politically incorrect, but our financial prosperity and individual desires are more important to us than being in right relationship with God—the same God who loves us so much that He would send His only son to suffer and die in our place, for our sin, so that we can live in His presence, in right relationship with Him and one another, and experience real prosperity and real blessings not only in this life but for all eternity.

Not only have we dug cisterns, but we have dug broken cisterns that cannot hold life giving water. Whatever we have put in God’s place does not and will not ever provide for us what we long for and what we really need. Instead of giving life, these idols provide only temporary relief that in the long run sickens, weakens and results in dysentery and death.

However, because He is a loving God, He still provides us with hope and the opportunity to be restored. 2Chronicles 7:14 says: “If my people who are called by my name, will 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.” Lord, let it begin in me!