**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JEREMIAH-003. FOUNTAIN AND CISTERNS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."*

*Jeremiah 2:13*

The proclivity of the Jews to idolatry is an outstanding fact all through their history. That persistent national tendency surely compels us to recognise a divine inspiration as the source of the prophetic teaching and of the lofty spiritual theology of the Old Testament, which were in sharpest unlikeness and opposition to the whole trend of the people's thoughts.

It is this apostasy which is referred to here. The false gods made by men are the broken cisterns. But the text embodies a general truth.

**I. The irksomeness of a godless life.**

The contrast is between the springing fountain, there in the desert, with the lush green herbage round about, where a man has only to stoop and drink, and the painful hewing of cisterns.

This emblem of the fountain beautifully suggests the great thought of God's own loving will as the self-originated impulse by which He pours out all good. Apart from all our efforts, the precious gift is provided for us. Our relation is only that of receivers.

We have the contrast with this in the laborious toils to which they condemn themselves who seek for created sources of good. Hewn out cisterns--think of a man who, with a fountain springing in his courtyard, should leave it and go to dig in the arid desert, or to hew the live rock in hopes to gain water. It was already springing and sparkling before him. The conduct of men, when they leave God and seek for other delights, is like digging a canal alongside a navigable river. They condemn themselves to a laborious and quite superfluous task. The true way to get is to take.

Illustrations in religion. Think of the toil and pains spent in idolatry and in corrupt forms of Christianity.

Illustrations in common life. Your toils--aye, and even your pleasures --how much of them is laboriously digging for the water which all the while is flowing at your side.

**II. The hopelessness of a godless life.**

The contrast further is between living waters and broken cisterns. God is the fountain of living waters; in other words, in fellowship with God there is full satisfaction for all the capacities and desires of the soul; heart--conscience--will--understanding--hope and fear.

The contrast of the empty cisterns. What a deep thought that with all their work men only make cisterns, i.e. they only provide circumstances which could hold delights, but cannot secure that water should be in them! The men-made cisterns must be God-filled, if filled at all. The true joys from earthly things belong to him who has made God his portion.

Further, they are broken cisterns, and all have in them some flaw or crack out of which the water runs. That is a vivid metaphor for the fragmentary satisfaction which all earthly good gives, leaving a deep yearning unstilled. And it is temporary as well as partial. He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again--nay, even as with those who indulge in intoxicating drinks, the appetite increases while the power of the draught to satisfy it diminishes. But the crack in the cistern points further to the uncertain tenure of all earthly goods and the certain leaving of them all.

All godless life is a grand mistake.

**III. The crime of a godless life.**

It is right to seek for happiness. It is sin to go away from God. You are thereby not merely flinging away your chances, but are transgressing against your sacredest obligations. Our text is not only a remonstrance on the grounds of prudence, showing God-neglecting men that they are foolish, but it is an appeal to conscience, convincing them that they are sinful. God loves us and cares for us. We are bound to Him by ties which do not depend on our own volition. And so there is punishment for the sin, and the evils experienced in a godless life are penal as well as natural.

We recall the New Testament modification of this metaphor, The water that I shall give him shall be in him a fountain of water. Arabs in desert round dried--up springs. Hagar. Shipwrecked sailors on a reef. Christ opens rivers in the wilderness and streams in the desert.