

Jeremiah 17:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living waters.

Analysis

This verse presents God as "the hope of Israel"—the covenant people's ultimate source of security, prosperity, and salvation. The Hebrew *miqveh* (מִקְבֵּה, hope) also means "pool" or "gathering of waters," playing on the metaphor developed in the phrase "fountain of living waters" (*meqor mayim chayim*, מְקוֹר מֵיִם חַיִם). God Himself is the life-giving source His people need.

Those who "forsake thee shall be ashamed"—the shame (*yevoshu*, יְבָשֻׂו) is public disgrace when their false hopes prove empty. "They that depart from me shall be written in the earth" contrasts with having one's name written in heaven (Luke 10:20) or in God's book of life (Rev 20:15). Being written in dust means mortality, impermanence, and judgment—their names and legacy will vanish.

The "fountain of living waters" imagery appears throughout Jeremiah (2:13, 17:13) and finds fulfillment in Christ, who offers living water that becomes an eternal spring within believers (John 4:10-14, 7:37-39). To forsake this fountain for broken cisterns (created things, false gods, self-reliance) is the height of folly. Only Christ satisfies the deepest thirst of the human soul.

Historical Context

Water scarcity made fountains and springs precious in ancient Palestine. "Living water" (mayim chayim) referred to flowing water from springs, contrasted with stagnant cistern water. Cisterns were common but prone to cracks, making them unreliable. The prophets used this imagery to condemn idolatry—exchanging the reliable, life-giving God for worthless substitutes (Jer 2:13, Isa 55:1-2). The metaphor would resonate powerfully with an audience dependent on water sources for survival.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What broken cisterns (false sources of life and satisfaction) are you tempted to dig for yourself?
2. How does forsaking God as the fountain of living waters lead to inevitable shame and disappointment?
3. In what ways does Christ uniquely fulfill the promise of being living water that eternally satisfies?

Interlinear Text

יב שׁא עָזַב אֶת כָּל יְהוָה מִקְרָא הָיָה
the hope of Israel O LORD all that forsake thee shall be ashamed
H4723 H3478 H3068 H3605 H5800 H954

עָזַב אֶת כָּל יְהוָה מִקְרָא הָיָה
and they that depart in the earth shall be written all that forsake
H3249 H776 H3789 H3588 H5800

מִקְרָא מִים פְּנֵי יָמִים אֶת יְהוָה
the fountain waters of living O LORD
H4726 H4325 H2416 H853 H3068

Additional Cross-References

Revelation 7:17 (Parallel theme): For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Revelation 22:1 (Parallel theme): And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

John 4:10 (Parallel theme): Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewst the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

John 4:14 (Parallel theme): But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

Revelation 21:6 (Parallel theme): And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

Isaiah 1:28 (References Lord): And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

Jeremiah 14:8 (Hope): O the hope of Israel, the saviour thereof in time of trouble, why shouldest thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?

Luke 10:20 (Parallel theme): Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Revelation 20:15 (Parallel theme): And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Isaiah 66:5 (References Lord): Hear the word of the LORD, ye that tremble at his word; Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified: but he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed.

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