

The Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations

Lesson 2: Israel's Faithlessness and the Fountain Forsaken -- Jeremiah 2:1-3:5

Every marriage that goes cold once started warm. Before the silence, before the slammed doors, there was a wedding, a first dance, a season when two people could not stop thinking about each other. So God opens this part of Jeremiah by remembering a honeymoon. "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown" (2:2). Picture young Israel walking out of Egypt, following the pillar of cloud into a barren desert, not because the desert had anything to offer, but because the LORD was there. That is what God remembers. He keeps the wedding photographs in His heart.

But this chapter is not a love letter; it is a lawsuit. God stands in the court of heaven and brings a charge against the people He rescued. "What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me?" (2:5). It is the ache of a faithful husband asking the only question that matters: what did I ever do to deserve this? He had carried them, fed them, planted them in a fruitful land. And they forgot. "They did not say, 'Where is the LORD who brought us up from the land of Egypt?'" (2:6). The most painful thing about ingratitude is how quietly it happens. No one decides to forget God. We simply stop asking where He is.

Then comes the verse that names the whole tragedy of the human race in a single image. "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (2:13). Think about that picture. God is a spring, bubbling up fresh, cold, endless, free. And His people turned their backs on the spring to go dig holes in the rock with their own blistered hands, holes that crack and leak and leave you thirsty. That is sin in its essence. Not just breaking a rule, but trading a fountain for a cracked bucket.

By chapter 3, the language has turned to the heartbreak of a broken marriage. Israel has played the harlot "on every high hill and under every green tree" (2:20), and still she returns with a brazen face and says, "I am innocent" (2:35). It would be a story of pure judgment except for one astonishing thread that runs through it: God still wants her back. He is wounded, He is grieved, He names the betrayal in unsparing detail, and yet underneath every accusation beats the heart of a God who has not stopped loving. As we walk through these verses, we are really looking into a mirror. The fountain is still flowing. The only question is whether we will drink from it, or keep digging in the rock.

Group Discussion: God begins His complaint by remembering the "devotion of your youth, your love as a bride" (2:2), the days when Israel followed Him into the wilderness. Why do you think the first thing God grieves is the loss of early love rather than simply the list of sins, and what does that tell us about what God most wants from His people?

Personal Reflection: God says His people committed two evils: they forsook the fountain of living waters and dug their own broken cisterns that hold no water (2:13). What is one “broken cistern” you have hewed out for yourself, some substitute you keep returning to that never satisfies, and what would it look like to come back to the fountain this week?

Read Jeremiah 2:1–3:5

Study Questions

1. Read 2:1–3. God remembers the “devotion” and “love as a bride” of Israel’s youth, when she followed Him into a barren wilderness. What does this opening reveal about the nature of God’s covenant with His people and the kind of love He desires from them?
2. God treasures the memory of a time when His people followed Him even into hard, unrewarding places (2:2). When was your own “bridal” season with the Lord, and what has cooled since then that you long to recover?
3. Read 2:4–13. God asks, “What wrong did your fathers find in me?” (2:5), then names the two great evils of verse 13. What does the image of forsaking “the fountain of living waters” for “broken cisterns” teach us about the true nature and folly of sin?
4. Sin rarely announces itself as rebellion; it usually feels like a small, reasonable substitution. Where have you been settling for a cracked cistern of your own making instead of drinking deeply from God Himself?

5. Read 2:14–19. Jeremiah says Israel's own evil will correct her and her backsliding will rebuke her, that it is "bitter" to forsake the LORD (2:19). How does Scripture show that sin carries its own built-in misery, and how is even that bitterness a mercy from God?
6. Look honestly at a season when walking away from God left you emptier, not freer. How did the "bitterness" of that wandering become one of the ways God called you home?
7. Read 2:20–28. God describes Israel as a chosen vine gone wild and a bride who plays the harlot "on every high hill" (2:20), worshiping things that cannot save. What does this expose about the spiritual unfaithfulness, or idolatry, that lies underneath outward sin?
8. Idols promise what only God can give, then leave us ashamed when trouble comes (2:27–28). What "god" in your life have you been tempted to cry out to in trouble, and what would it mean to trust the living God there instead?
9. Read 2:29–3:5. Though Israel insists "I am innocent" (2:35) and has "a harlot's brow" that refuses to be ashamed (3:3), God still calls, "Return to me" (3:1). How can God be perfectly just in His charges and yet remain astonishingly merciful in His invitation, and how does this tension find its fullest answer in Christ?

10. Look back across this whole passage, from the bridal love of chapter 2 to the wounded, pleading heart of God in chapter 3. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using these verses to draw you back to the fountain and to reshape your love for Him this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hosea 2:14–20, where God woos His unfaithful bride back into the wilderness to speak tenderly to her again; John 4:13–14, where Jesus offers the Samaritan woman water that becomes a spring welling up to eternal life; John 7:37–39, Jesus crying out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink”; Isaiah 55:1–3, the invitation to come to the waters without money and to forsake the bread that does not satisfy; Revelation 22:17, the Spirit and the Bride saying, “Come,” and the offer of the water of life without price.

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