

Fountain of Living Water  
[Jeremiah 1:4-10, 2:4-7,12-14](#)  
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The prophets make very clear that we have choices before us. With Amos, the question is will we live life on the straight and narrow road, aligning our ethical decisions according to what is right? With Hosea, will we repent from our selfish ways, so that God can take us in again with love and forgiveness? With Isaiah, will we work with God to cultivate abundant life for all? In every case, will we make the choice that leads to wholeness, to *shalom*?

Today, Jeremiah asks, "Will we trust God, the fountain of living water, or will we store our water in containers that leak and run dry?"

The 40 years of Jeremiah's prophesy was the most turbulent of all biblical times. Jeremiah was prophet in Jerusalem during invasions by the Assyrians from the north, by the Scythians from the Black Sea, and by the Babylonians from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. The Babylonians defeated Assyria and Egypt, and the deportations started, sending thousands of people from Judah into exile in Babylon. Nebuchadrezzar's armies destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BCE, and the captain of the invading guard put out the eyes of King Zedekiah, the last king of Judah. They carried King Zedekiah and several thousand leading citizens of Jerusalem off into exile. Jeremiah was thrown in prison, and then dragged off to Egypt. Jerusalem lay virtually uninhabited for almost 60 years. (Camilla Smith, *So You Want to Read the Bible: The Period of the Great Prophets*, 34). Think of this part of the world today: Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Israel-Palestine...the whole region still experiences political and religious unrest.

God's call came to Jeremiah as a young man. He responded, "I am only a boy!" But God said the words we hear so often throughout the bible, "Do not be afraid." It seems God knew that Jeremiah would be a prophet already from when he was in the womb. When Jeremiah wrote this, he must have understood his role as predestined. There is an intimacy here, which is touching. God formed Jeremiah in the womb to be a prophet and called him as a boy. God appointed him "over nations and kingdoms to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." Jeremiah was to be part of God's judgment of the people and also part of their restoration.

The judgment was necessary because the people had forgotten what God had done for them. So the prophet reminds the people that God brought them up from slavery in Egypt and out of the wilderness "where no one survives." God brought them "into a land of plenty, to enjoy its gifts and goodness." They had a choice. They could have kept the covenant with God and worshipped only God and followed God's commandments to care for their neighbors. But they ruined the land and disgraced God's heritage by worshipping other gods. Jeremiah summarizes the sins of the people in God's words: "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (2:13).

In other words, the people went their own way and ignored God's rule on their life. They were supposed to live out God's code of ethics, but they failed. They thought they could go it alone. But that choice led to doom, which Jeremiah interpreted as death and deportation.

I wonder what that choice looks like today, the choice between a fountain of living water and broken cisterns. Cisterns are like idols. We put our trust in them, but they are ultimately cracked. They don't hold water.

Some put their trust in status. I knew a couple, who felt they had to enroll their children in a particular private elementary school because it had such a well-known reputation. I don't think it was really about the children's needs, and the public schools were great where they lived. The husband felt from the start that they couldn't afford the tuition, but he wanted to keep his wife happy, so reluctantly he agreed. But, the truth was, he couldn't earn enough money to satisfy all his wife's aspirations in terms of their social standing. Their relationship was doomed, and it has since dissolved.

Some put their trust in credit cards. The median credit card debt in the United States is \$3000 ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credit\\_card\\_debt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Credit_card_debt)). Internet sites say the average credit card debt varies from \$1000-\$7000 per person with a credit card. Perhaps you know someone who has fallen into the trap of buying whatever he or she pleases—a new swimming pool, expensive anniversary jewelry, a cruise, etc. and then really couldn't pay for these luxuries. We can fall into a habit of putting our trust in a resource that simply isn't there. The cistern runs dry. It's empty. Why? Because the idol is a falsehood. Plastic money is a false God.

Some put their trust in denial. This is a true story. A boy named Dan—we'll call him that—had two older brothers. Dan was jealous of his brothers who had friends and always seemed to have a good time. Dan usually felt like an unwelcome tag-along. He would hang around the fort his brothers built and mostly watch the others play. Once one of the neighbor boys gave him a cigarette, and he immediately felt like one of the group. His brothers went to high school, and Dan was left playing alone after school. Then when Dan became a freshman, he signed up for the marching band. What a great feeling to be a part of a group. There was a chance to play drums in the jazz band too, and so Dan signed up. The afternoon before the first evening rehearsal, a student offered him some drinks from a bottle he had to pass the time before the rehearsal. It tasted terrible, but the feeling of belonging was the best. That day led to daily drinking and smoking marijuana. Somehow, Dan continued to do well in school, and was accepted to a good college. It meant going away from home, so drinking was even easier. Dan traded dorm rooms until he found roommates who also liked to party. Amazingly, Dan managed his classes and got a 4.0 g.p.a. in college, due to his excellent memory for facts.

Dan started dating a girl from home. She was traditional, so Dan hid from her his drinking habit. They got married, though Dan said later they never were very close emotionally, probably because he was never honest with her, and he never really experienced his own feelings. Dan completed medical school—drinking all the way through. He had a few extramarital affairs along the way. By this time, he was keeping a bottle in the car, and

shopping for alcohol at different liquor stores, so no one would suspect the quantity of his consumption. Dan's wife was bored a lot, and left Dan with the children—by then they had four—which only gave Dan more opportunity to drink at will. By the time Dan was working as a doctor, he could only go 2 hours before he needed another drink. His tremors were so bad he could barely sign his name. He lost his appetite. He came to dread each workday. Life had become nearly unbearable. One day Dan was too sick to go in to work. He asked his wife to take him to the ER; he knew he was having a gastro-intestinal bleed. The chairman of his department came to see him and suggested he have an in-patient evaluation. He finally admitted he had a problem.

Dan is one of the lucky alcoholics. He had a good education and a prestigious job. That job gave him a referral to a program to work through his addiction to alcohol. He told his wife everything. She was very angry and hurt. Dan was angry too, and even in treatment didn't admit to the severity of his problem right away. Then when he finished a 70-day in-house program, he joined Alcoholics Anonymous, went to daily meetings, and got a sponsor. Dan began to see that he needed to make change happen in his life. And he admitted that he needed help. Eventually Dan made amends to everyone he had hurt, and he was able to return to work. He claims now that he is a much better physician than he was before. Now he is grateful to be guided by a set of principles in his life

([http://www.massmed.org/Physician\\_Health\\_Services/Helping\\_Yourself\\_and\\_Others/Success\\_Story\\_\\_An\\_Amazing\\_Journey\\_to\\_Sobriety/#.V7IzKWxz4hY](http://www.massmed.org/Physician_Health_Services/Helping_Yourself_and_Others/Success_Story__An_Amazing_Journey_to_Sobriety/#.V7IzKWxz4hY)).

Sometimes it takes hitting the bottom to stop denying and to accept the need for change. Denying problems doesn't make them go away. We are cracked vessels. We are flawed. Only if we admit our dependence on God can we rebuild our lives.

The prophets offer judgment, but they also offer restoration. It's always available because God's salvation is like an ever-flowing fountain.

I wonder what it means to you to seek restoration at the fountain of living water. What needs restoring in your life? Are you stressed and anxious? It's the time of year when you may feel the weight of many demands on you. This may be a time to ask God to lighten your load and bring you calm.

Are you aimless and without purpose? Can God's living water give you a new focus this fall? Perhaps you will take on a project that makes you think less about yourself and more about others. Maybe you will want to help with Circles for Change and experience knowing people very different from you—people in poverty who are homeless or without jobs.

Are you tired of your life? Are you too focused on an illness or a bad relationship or a bad situation at work? Perhaps you will be moved today to respond to the needs of those suffering from wild fires. Helping others can help us stop thinking about our own problems. Compared to others, we are so blessed. How can you be a blessing to others?

God always draws us away from ourselves and more toward God and more toward other people and their needs. The prophets dared to question the status quo; they dared to love and serve others. Jeremiah was the prophet of the exile. He was the first to teach the people that they carry God's covenant with them; that they did not need to have the temple in Jerusalem to worship God. Even in times of destruction and dislocation, we need not be afraid. We can write God's covenant on our hearts.

Jesus was a prophet in this way. He carried God's love with him wherever we went. He defied the worship of idols—like pride, self-righteousness, and social status. Instead, he prayed to God humbly, and then spent his time with the people who were different: people who were gentiles, disabled, young, old, poor...Jesus taught us to love God and our neighbor—to give people a living wage—to bring those on the margin into the community where there are relationships and resources. Like Jeremiah, Jesus wept, he cried out in anger, and he prayed to God in anguish. His great love caused him to be a threat to the Roman regime, and he was arrested and killed.

Jesus' life is still a call to follow, a summons to serve humanity. Jesus is for us the living water—the same water that comes from the fountain of living water that Jeremiah spoke of. With this living water we will never thirst, and the water will overflow and provide plenty for all our sisters and brothers in need. It is our choice: Will we put our trust in God, the fountain of living water?