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PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

In what ways do you test God's wisdom and judgment?

Are there thoughts and actions you wish you could now stop but feel enslaved to so you can obtain the resources necessary for life? What are they?

In your mind, what are examples of God's living water and the impotent water of the world? How are they different from each other?

Jeremiah 2:13 – ...for 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.

I) **Two Wrongs...**

We do not recognize our condition at first. It sneaks up on us. Early in life, we decide to test authority by violating boundaries. We learn those that are unwatched or inconsequential and those that trigger swift punishment. We process these facts, deciding for ourselves which boundaries are worth crossing again. This develops the reality we inhabit. A lifestyle forms on these choices. This is our norm. All the while, we suppress the knowledge that this is deadly foolishness. Deadly, because we are incompetent to know what will damage us. Foolishness, because we do know that we don't know. That's the thrill of it. But thrill is not the essence of life, and two wrongs don't make a right.

NOVEMBER 23RD, 2025

♦**Turn our back:** We glance over our shoulder, sly grin across our face, to be certain the one who claims authority over us sees what we are about to do. We dash across the boundary as fast as we can. Onlookers think, how cute! This encourages our sense of innocence. It's anything but. In this act, "my people have committed (Jeremiah 2:13)," the first evil. We turn our back on the One who loves us. We return over and over inside the boundary, but the relationship does not recover. We have discovered the freedom to leave.

♦**Run to another:** Had we left the confines of obedience and returned unchanged, it's possible we would remain innocent. Perhaps it would be nothing but a cute game of catch me if you can. Maybe that's all we consciously thought it was. Instead, our knowledge of the world is fundamentally changed. The second of the "two evils (v13)," is learning we can be our own judge of what life is. This is deeper than redefining right and wrong. It's a wholesale change in what we are and why we exist.

II) Do Not Make...

We are unconscious of this rewiring of our brain. Most of us don't realize we returned from foreign ground to an abandoned wasteland to sit on a crumbling throne inside a court of decay. We left one home and returned to another. The way back was lost. We left an abundant, eternal life to see what else was out there. We came back to find that no matter our life choices, they are not equivalent. We are incapable of creating a way to life because its power is not ours. All the options before us are part of a finite existence. We just don't know it yet.

♦**Broken connection:** It is unclear which time we dash away that we learn this fateful truth. Maybe it is the first time. What is clear is that God did not set boundaries to trap us. He set them to protect us. He was, is, and will always be God. He cannot be otherwise. The instant our minds realized we could be in control, we wrested it from Him. "They have forsaken me (v13)," for our own authority. The power of life does not flow through this broken connection. Only later do we know that all power is not the same.

♦**Key ingredient:** The boundaries are set to keep us connected to "the fountain of living water (v13)." Anywhere within them we live with an eternal purpose and renewable power. We would never be stranded in the wasteland we now find ourselves in. But we saw water here, too. We thought we could navigate safely on our own. The water here is not the same. It is missing a key ingredient, the essence of life. It keeps the body going for now, but we never get enough for full restoration. Slowly, we suffer the damage of decay and begin to break down. It's already too late.

III) A Right...

Our mistake is not innocent. God told us His ways lead to life but ours lead to destruction. We misjudged the amount of life's water needed to sustain us. There is not enough water to go around in this world, and we don't claim a right over that which there is. We toil for it, getting just enough to keep us going, but only for a while. All the time we think we are fine, not recognizing our slow demise. It is this, the day-to-day imperceptibility of our spiritual dehydration, that gives us plausible deniability.

♦**Suitable replacement:** We perceived a suitable replacement across the border. But we did not know scarcity. We had no reason to consider how much water there was, because we had never been without an endless supply. We "dug out cisterns for (v13)," ourselves expecting them to be continually full. They aren't. We can be generous and kind, until things get tight. We can be compassionate and gentle, until another's ways become worse than inconvenient. It is the moments of discomfort and fear when these cisterns come up empty.

♦**Wrong function:** The bowl of a fountain need not hold water. It is constantly overflowing from the source. It needs to make it accessible. God led us to still waters. We built cisterns for the wrong function. Here in the wasteland, we need an impermeable container. Instead, we have "cracked cisterns that can hold no water (v13)." They pool it up for a rushed drink before it's gone. Praise God that He will not withhold His living water from us once we release our denial.