

The Stopped-Up Well: Rissah

*And they removed from Libnah and pitched at Rissah,
Numbers 33:21*

T

hroughout Bible times, a well was the center of life. People from all walks and social strata converged at the well to drink and visit as they watered their livestock. As long as the well offered water, life thrived in the region around it. The blessing of a well was two-fold: water was a physical necessity and its presence brought life to the land. In addition, water represented the cleansing, refreshing Presence of *YAH*'s Spirit bringing life to sin-parched souls.

Fittingly, Abraham and his descendants brought a blessing to the land by constructing wells wherever they traveled. Thus, Abraham's



passage was marked with wells and altars, which stood as an enduring testimony to his devotion to *Yahweh*. As a spiritual and figurative witness among the heathen, Abraham's wells were, "Wells of Salvation," wherever he dwelt.

The local natives, surrounding Abraham's wells, knew who had brought these blessings. Some were, no doubt, grateful

for the gift of water. But others rejected the offer of life and hospitality. They refused to accept blessings at the hands of *Yahweh's* servant. These hardened pagans revealed their disdain for *YAH's* followers by coming along behind and stopping up the wells, thus preventing themselves and anyone else from enjoying the life-giving flow.

"...A well of water... symbolizes the Reservoir from which we partake of Eternal Life."

When the Children of Israel left *Libnah* and camped at *Rissah*, they found the centuries-old well of Abraham stopped up. One meaning of *Rissah* is "stopped-up well."²¹ *Rissah* also means "the dropping of dew."²² In both cases, in order to fully unlock the message of *Rissah*, one first needs to understand the spiritual significance of water.

Throughout the Scriptures, water often symbolizes the cleansing and refreshing work of the Holy Spirit. Water is also a Scriptural metaphor representing the life-giving work of the Truth, found in *Yahweh's* Word.

... [Yahshua] also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word,
Ephesians 5:25-26.

My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass,
Deuteronomy 32:2.

Considering the meaning of water and rain, a well of water offers a rich, spiritual message. It symbolizes the Reservoir from which we partake of Eternal Life.

... The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into Everlasting Life, John 4:14.

FORSAKEN FOUNTAIN

In the days of Abraham and ancient Israel, to stop up someone's well, conveyed a message of hostility: "We don't want you here. Move on!"

For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them with earth. And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham, his father, Genesis 26:15, 18a.

Stopping up the wells of Abraham was also a blatant rejection of Abraham's Mighty One. In forsaking the Fountains of the Living YAH, mankind ends up fruitlessly searching for sustenance from the broken and waterless cisterns of the world.

For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the Fountain of Living Waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water, Jeremiah 2:13.

These broken cisterns offer, symbolically, exciting stimulation, eye-catching affluence, and temporary notoriety. Nevertheless, they cannot yield long-term peace, true prosperity, or everlasting joy. Nothing coming from the world's broken cisterns gives an enduring blessing.

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The addict seeks stimulation in the broken cistern of substance abuse. But, it yields no lasting happiness, although fortune and fame may be found at the waterless fountains of Earth. Ironically, as is demonstrated by numerous accounts of tragic suicides and stories of drug addiction among the "stars," many of those who have achieved worldly "success" are neither fulfilled nor happy. Indeed, many

spend time and fortune desperately chasing an ever-elusive nirvana, at broken cisterns which can never satisfy.

Man's futile attempt to drink from these unsatisfying reservoirs, necessitates his returning there again and again. Yet, each effort to find the desired blessing is as unproductive as the last. It was this spiritual reality that the Saviour revealed, in His powerful encounter with the Samaritan woman.



There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: [Yahshua] saith unto her, Give Me to drink.. Then saith the woman of Samaria unto Him, How is it that Thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the

Samaritans. [Yahshua] answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of YAH, 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. The woman saith unto Him, Sir, Thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast Thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? [Yahshua] answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: 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, John 4:7-14.

There is only one ancient Source of Living Waters, which quenches our thirst and satisfies our longing souls. Like the Philistines did to the wells of Abraham, which connected, in symbol, to this eternal Cistern, the enemy works to stop up our Water Source.

This is the one ancient Well the devil hopes we will never “re-dig” in our generation. It is the Well of our spiritual fathers that he fears the most. Is it any wonder that Satan launches vicious attacks on those who would return to unstop the “Wells” of Truth, bequeathed to us by the “Father of the Faithful”? The Water from these Wells transforms the conquered into conquerors, the fearful into the fearless, and the faithless into “faith-full.” These Wells hold the key that places all of the resources of Heaven into the frailest of human hands. We need a draft from the Wells of Abraham.

LIKE THE GENTLE DEW

*“... To possess
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means we
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the living-dead
of the world.”*

One of the most significant stations in the wilderness journey is *Rissah*. As we have seen, it was here that the Children of Israel reclaimed the ancient wells of their spiritual forefathers. *Rissah* also means “the dropping of dew.”²³ The word is consistently used throughout Scripture to suggest the refreshing rain of the Holy Spirit, bringing grace to sin-parched souls. Considering the positive meaning of *Libnah*, it can suggest the “purifying” influence of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we may piece together the lesson of *Rissah*, both the positive and the negative.

Let the faithful Christian, in the desert of this world, lift his head toward Heaven and he will receive *YAH*'s gentle sprinklings, bringing him new life. At our faintest cry and our feeblest call of desperation, *Yahweh* sends the needed “Dew of refreshment.” How eager is the Spirit to enliven! How merciful is our Father to save!

In spite of the continued rebellion among the people, *Yahweh* still mercifully watered them with Grace. The multitude was barred from the earthly Canaan, but they still had the hope of the Heavenly home. And He sent the “dew” to moisten the “seeds of repentance,”²⁴ then scattered throughout the camp.

What does it mean, experientially, to possess the Water of Life within, while passing through the spiritual wastelands of this world? It means we possess real Life, amidst the living-dead of the world. The refreshed soul stands out, like a flourishing plant in a dry desert. Some react against this refreshment, and like the natives around *Rissah*, they try to stop up the Well, preventing it from blessing them and others.

Some, like the woman at the well, sense its Presence, and seek it with every fiber of their beings. These find Life and true sustainment. So powerful and transforming is this Living Water, that it strengthens them to thrive in the harshest of circumstances.

Consider the story of a young German soldier during World War II. The sun was setting over the battlefield and the Sabbath hours were drawing near. Several German soldiers prepared to spend the night together in a foxhole. Among them was a Christian. Most of the men amused themselves by idly playing cards and telling rude jokes. But, the Christian soldier moved away from the game, and sought a quiet refuge in which to read his Bible and pray.

As always, the Words from the Scripture passages refreshed his soul anew. And as the young man quietly worshipped the Almighty, drinking from this Living Fountain, the battlefield, and even the war itself, seemed to melt away.



When a green and thriving plant flourishes in a desert, it gets attention. Thus, even though the Christian soldier was meditating quietly, his rowdy companions quickly noticed. At first his comrades poked fun at him. They taunted him that all his Bible reading wouldn't change the fact that they were all completely surrounded by the enemy. Yet all their rudeness and snide remarks didn't seem to affect the young soldier.

Suddenly, one soldier, who had been leading the verbal attack on the young Christian, grabbed the Bible from his hands, and threw it out of the foxhole with all his might. The Christian watched helplessly as his Bible sailed out into the night, landing many feet from safety.

“There,” the persecutor smirked cruelly, “if you want your precious Bible so much, why don’t you go out there and get it”?

The challenge was laid; the “gauntlet” had been thrown down. To this heathen heart, *Yahweh* was merely a myth, a mental crutch for an ignorant mind. But, the young Christian knew better. He had long been drinking at the Life-giving Fountains of the Most High.

The soldier crawled out of the foxhole after his Bible, fervently praying the whole time. Visible only to him, a supernatural light shone about the Christian, revealing the faces and forms of the enemy soldiers waiting in the trees on every side. In the angelic illumination, the young man was easily able to see his lost Bible. He crawled quickly toward it, retrieved it, and returned with it to the safety of the foxhole.

Incredulous, his companions gaped, unable to believe what they had just seen. “What are we hiding down here for?” the persecutor blustered. “They’ve obviously all gone.”

“No!” the young Christian protested. But, it was too late. The prideful persecutor was already beginning to climb up out of the foxhole. The top of his head had just barely cleared the lip of the trench, when a single gunshot sliced the silence of the night. The slain man fell back into the foxhole, with a bullet hole in his forehead.

The men were stunned! Their foolishness fled from their minds. No one doubted that the Almighty had miraculously protected the young Christian. And the body of the slain mocker lay as a mute testimony. So deeply impacted were they, that their former interest in cards and crude jesting was long forgotten. Together they huddled about the young Christian and his precious Bible. Together they drank of Heaven’s Living Water, and were filled with peace.²⁵

REFRESHED IN PRAYER

Be encouraged in the wilderness, our Redeemer has sent refreshing Dew. It is present with the dawn and in the night season. If we will fall on our knees before His Throne, this heavenly moisture will fall on us. How beautiful the promise of spiritual refreshment to those with ears to hear and eyes to see! Like the dew upon a flower, so the Spirit revives the soul.

*"Libnah, the
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resistance,
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we re-dig the
stopped up wells
at Rissah."*

He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth, Ps. 72:6.

What a blessing is the Life-giving Dew of YAH's Spirit upon the weary, suffering soul! May we find this blessed refreshment just beyond the crushing experiences of *Libnah*! After the terrible trial, comes the ministry of angels (Hebrews 1:14). After wrestling in prayer comes the Heavenly peace. Prior to the opening of the heart to *Yahweh*, the soul may be as parched as the blighted land before Elijah's prayer for rain. But, with prayerful submission comes the showers of forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal.

Yahshua, our Saviour, and Divine Example, knew the necessity of submission to the Father through prayer. Fifteen of *Yahshua*'s prayer circumstances are mentioned in Scripture (Fifteen is the number of sacred rest, in Hebrew Gematria²⁶). In this Biblical record of our Saviour's prayers, we find a powerful pattern, which we should follow.

Yahshua's vital prayer-life was echoed in the lives of His followers of the Early Christian Church. After the Saviour's Ascension, the believers gathered together in the Upper Room, seeking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. If we desire the "Upper Room" experiences of Acts 2:2, and 4:31, we must first learn the lessons of *Libnah* and *Rissah*. That message is hidden in the words of *Yahshua*:

Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My Name: Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full, John 16:24.

In response to our prayers of faith, *Yahweh* answers our hearts' longing with gentle grace, descending as the revitalizing rain. *Libnah*, the wall of bitter resistance, crumbles when we re-dig the stopped-up wells of *Rissah*. Shoveling away years of debris and the world's clutter, we find the product is certainly worth the effort. Our Heavenly Father responds by raining down refreshment on the soul. The ancient Wells of Salvation will be unstopped, and Heaven's Dew will descend again, when we pray with Jeremiah and Hosea:

O [Yahweh], my Strength, and my Fortress, and my Refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto Thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit, Jeremiah 16:19.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek [Yahweh], till He come and rain righteousness upon you, Hosea 10:12.

He is the same YAH still,
Oh, let us open our deepest hearts to the drops
of His comforting dews!
Dear Lord, moisten my dry and parched nature in every part!
Make it sweet and bright and cool.
Lead me, just now to Rissah!²⁷



SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THREE

- *Rissah*, Israel's 17th campsite, means "stopped-up well" and "descending dew." It was here that the Children of Israel encountered the wells of Abraham, stopped up by local hostiles in their rejection of their witness.
- Abraham and his descendents were known for marking their passage through the land with wells and altars to *Yahweh*. In the wells and altars he left behind, Abraham offered the people life, physically and spiritually.
- As the heathens, who stopped up Abraham's wells to quell their message of Salvation, many today reject regeneration and Truth. Instead, they seek sustainment at the polluted "cisterns" of the world, which are unable to yield long-term peace, true prosperity, or everlasting joy.
- Like Israel at *Rissah*, *Yahweh's* end-time people must re-dig the Wells of Salvation, which come down to us from our spiritual forefathers. The same Life-giving Water which blessed Abraham of old, is offered to us, today.