

Study Notes: Jeremiah 23:1-8

December 18, 2011

Historical Setting

- This section is a denunciation of the Monarchy, focusing in particular on the last five kings of Judah (21:11-12; 22:1). See also 33:15-16.
- Their fundamental failing was that they had “forsaken the covenant and worshiped other gods along with the moral failure that accompanies such false worship (22:3, 8-9). Jeremiah 22:8-9: “People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?’”⁹ And the answer will be: ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods.’”
 - King Zedekiah reigned from 597-587 BC. He succeeded his nephew Jehoiachin at the time of his deportation. Zedekiah was fighting against King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in disobedience to the clear command of the LORD. In a complete reversal of the LORD fighting *for* Israel, the LORD says instead, “I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a strong arm in anger, wrath, and great fury...” (21:4). Further, all those who have thus far managed to survive pestilence, sword, and famine, will be sent into exile (v. 7). God’s choices are: fight and die, or surrender and live (vv. 8-10)!
 - Jehoahaz (Shallum ben Josiah) (22:10-12) Jehoahaz was shipped off to Babylon never to return (vv. 11-12).
 - Jehoiakim (vv. 13-19) In the process of building a house for himself while Jehoahaz is away (vv. 13-14). Jehoiakim had “no eyes and no thought” except for personal gain and others expense. No one will lament for him, he will be dragged outside the city like a donkey and buried.
 - Jehoiachin (22:24) handed over to the Babylonians and died in captivity. “...shall not be the signet ring on my right hand... I will pull you off...” (v. 24) The signet ring was used to impress the owner’s signature into a document. Earthenware jars used to collect grain and oil for taxation purposes carried the royal stamp with the two-winged symbol, the word “belonging to the king”. This same figure was also applied to Jehoiachin’s grandson Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:23) Jeremiah 22:30: “This is what the LORD says: “Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.”
 - In 597 BC the leaders and nobility of Jerusalem were rounded up and deported (22:22; 2 Kings 24:25:7)

Text

¹ **"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD.**

² **Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people:**

**"You have scattered my flock and have driven them away,
and you have not attended to them.**

Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD.

**³ Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them,
and I will bring them back to their fold,
and they shall be fruitful and multiply.**

**⁴ I will set shepherds over them who will care for them,
and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.**

- Anytime the word “Woe” appears in a divine communication... it’s not good! While Zedekiah may be the man on the throne, this oracle of judgment is really aimed at a long list of “inept, careless, and neglectful rulers for many years past Thompson, 487).” Through their direct leadership they have scattered and destroyed God’s flock.
- These so called shepherds have done that exact opposite of everything a good shepherd should do. They have scattered the flock instead of gathered the flock. They have driven them away rather than driven them home.
- Because they have “not attended” to them therefore God says “I will attend to you”. The same verb is used in two senses.
- *I myself will gather the remnant* God himself will do the shepherding. Note here that in v. 1 the negligent shepherds were the ones who destroyed and scattered the sheep. But in v. 3 it is the LORD who claims ultimate administrative responsibility “where I have driven them...” The one who scattered is the one who will bring them home.
- Unlike their former poverty, the sheep under their new shepherd will enjoy a better state of affairs of fruitfulness and increase. Hosea 2:21-22: “In that day I will respond,” declares the LORD-- “I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; ²² and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil...” Amos 9:13: “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.” See also: Ezek. 36; Zech. 8:9-13. They will be brought back to the fold, enjoy new shepherds who will care for them, they shall be free from fear and terror, and “none of them shall be missing.” Nothing could be more fundamentally important than the shepherd should account for every sheep!

**⁵ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD,
when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch,
and he shall reign as king and deal wisely,
and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.**

**⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely.
And this is the name by which he will be called:
‘The LORD is our righteousness.’**

- Jeremiah breaks into poetry (see NIV). Here an ideal king of the Davidic line is announced under whose just and victorious rule the dynastic hopes of Judah will be realized. (See the Royal Psalms 2, 44, 72, 89-110)
- *a righteous shoot or true branch* A shoot will burst forth from the Davidic tree, which though cut off, is not dead. In postexilic times the term “branch” became a virtual technical term for the expected ideal king (Zech. 3:8; 6:12). This same figure is also used in Isa. 11:1. Thompson mentions it might be “legitimate scion” which is against the background that some felt Jehoiachin was the legitimate king and not Zedekiah.
- Unlike the virtual puppet king Zedekiah (22:28) this king will “rule and act wisely” and further, unlike the present Davidic representatives, he would maintain justice and right in the land. 2 Samuel 8:15: “David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.”
- V. 6 moves from the Messianic person to the Messianic Kingdom. (Isa. 11:1-5 and 6-16)
- Judah will be “saved” or “rescued,” “delivered,” “liberated”. See Jer. 30-31.
- As in Isa. 9:6 a symbolic name is given to the coming king, “Yahweh is our Righteousness”. It is most likely a word-play on King Zedekiah’s name (*sedeq* = Zedekiah) It would not be surprising for a king to take such a name and especially not surprising for a prophet to draw upon the contrast by pointing out that “Yahweh is our Righteousness.” *Sedeq* denotes “what is right,” or “what is just,” but the plural means “saving acts” which would include the saving presence and activity of Yahweh. The meaning is ‘the LORD is my vindication’. This king will impart to men a righteousness not of works but of grace (Eph. 2:8) which will include personal holiness as the work of the Spirit after justification Harrison, p. 120).

⁷ **"Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say,**

'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,'

⁸ **but**

'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.'

Then they shall dwell in their own land."

- See also 16:14-15. There will be an exodus which will surpass in grandeur the original Exodus from Egypt. (See Isa. 11; Ezk. 34, 37)

Jesus is the Good Shepherd

- John 10:1-18** "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-- only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."
- John 10:27-29** My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

Reset:

- Judgment on the monarchy...

 - vv. 1-4 future renewal and restoration
 - vv. 5-6 the ideal king will reign in peace and righteousness
 - vv. 7-8 future restoration of the exiles in a new and more wonderful exodus