

## The Lord Is Our Righteousness: The Messianic Promises of Jeremiah

Jeremiah 23:1-8

December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025

1. \_\_\_\_\_ leaders led to a \_\_\_\_\_ people. (23:1-2)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. God will \_\_\_\_\_ the people and \_\_\_\_\_ faithful leaders. (23:3-4)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Jesus is the promised righteous \_\_\_\_\_ of a greater \_\_\_\_\_. (23:5-8)

## Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Jeremiah 23:1-8

1. How does the historical context of the book of Jeremiah set the stage for this promise of a righteous future king? Read Jeremiah 1:1-3; 22:11-18 and also consider what else you know about the pattern of the kings of Israel and Judah.
2. Why is “shepherd” language used to describe the leaders of Israel, especially the kings? See 2 Sam. 5:2
3. Based on the “woe” language of Jer. 23:1-2, what were the shepherds failing to do? How might that also describe leaders who fall short today, whether in the local church or in broader society?
4. How is God’s care for His people seen and described in this passage? Consider also Psalm 100:3 and Ezek. 34:30-31
  - a. Why is it important both for leaders and the rest of the people to understand God’s care for His people?
5. Based on Jer. 23:4-8, which aspects of these promises seem to have been accomplished in the returns under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah and which seem to point ahead to the Messiah?
  - a. Of the Messianic portions, which parts have already been accomplished by Jesus and which parts await His second coming?
6. Why are wisdom, justice, and righteousness essential in godly leadership? Why can we be grateful that these attributes characterize Jesus, our righteous king?
7. What is significant about the specific language the Messianic King will have the name “The Lord is our righteousness”? In what way is Jesus not merely “righteous” but “our righteousness”? Consider Is. 64:6; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Cor. 1:30; Phil. 3:8-9

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Big idea: Jesus is the promised king who will gather the scattered people and lead them with wisdom and righteousness.

### Intro

No nativity set is complete without some men who represent the wise men in Matthew chapter 2. The wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem to look for the one who was born king of the Jews. We know from context that they would have arrived later than the actual birth, perhaps a couple years later, but it's part of the familiar nativity story.

Who were these men and how did they know to come?

They were “from the east”, likely the region of Persian in modern day Iran.

They were “wise man” or “magi,” educated in ancient literature, including the writings of a semitic people who had been transplanted by a former world power.

In those writings, they learned that a king was promised to come to these people.

**Matthew 2:5-6** They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"

He would be a ruler who would shepherd God's people, Israel.

That quote was from Micah 5:2, but it wasn't alone as an Old Testament prophecy about the shepherd ruler.

This morning we will look at another such prophecy that is a little less popular at Christmas, but it's rich, and it helps inform our understanding of Jesus the Messiah.

When we sing the final verse of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and we sing “O Come, O King of Nations bind, all people in one heart and mind” or we sing, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing, glory to the newborn king,” this passage in Jeremiah tells us what kind of King He is.

1. **Unfaithful** leaders led to a **scattered** people. (23:1-2)
  - a. His righteous, just, good rule is contrasted with the prevailing conditions in Israel during the time of Jeremiah and indeed throughout most of their history as a nation.
  - b. Jeremiah served as a prophet to the southern kingdom, Judah, during the reign of the final righteous king and four wicked kings that follow.
    - i. **Jeremiah 1:1-3** The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, 2 to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. 3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.
    - ii. Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah – the last kings of Judah as they were taken into captivity.
  - c. This chapter begins with an indictment of the leaders – the shepherds – which includes the kings but probably also the religious leaders.
    - i. The kings were criticized in the previous chapter for using their position merely to enrich themselves.

1. **Jeremiah 22:15** "Do you become a king because you are competing in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink And do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.
- ii. Of the priests and prophets he wrote:
  1. **Jeremiah 5:31** The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?
- d. Instead of teaching and leading the people well, the shepherds are destroying and scattering God's sheep, God's people.
  - i. He says they are scattering them, driving them away, not attending to them.
  - ii. A good shepherd just like a rancher, knows the condition of his flock. He spends time with them. He's aware of their needs, their sickness, their threats. But the leaders of the people had not done that. They did not correct, teach, instruct, or lead.
  - iii. Our backyard chickens give us a very small taste of this. I usually go out in the morning to check on them and collect any eggs they have already laid. I look to see if they have food and water. I go back out after work to collect the rest of the eggs and that's usually when I would give them food or water. I count them to make sure they are all there. I ensure the heat lamp is working if it's going to be cold. I begin to notice over time by their behavior if they are out of food or water even before I make it to the coop.
  - iv. "Attend" also has the idea of call to account or discipline, which is why he says he will "attend to you for the evil of your deeds."
  - v. The shepherds have not attended to the people so God will attend to them with discipline.
- e. God's personal care for the people is implied throughout.
  - i. They are "the sheep of My pasture" v. 1
  - ii. "My people" and "My flock" v. 2
  - iii. God has a personal concern for the people, which is why His anger is justly stirred by the neglectful and sinful conduct against the kings and the religious leaders.
- f. However, it's not that the people were innocent.
  - i. **Jeremiah 5:1** Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, And look now and take note. And seek in her open squares, If you can find a man, If there is one who does justice, who seeks truth, Then I will pardon her.
  - ii. But he doesn't find it. The people refuse to take correction, they refuse to repent. He goes on to say, "maybe it's just the poor, I'll go to the great" but it's no better.
  - iii. The problems of idolatry and injustice and oppression run from the rich to the poor, from the leaders to the rest of the people.
2. God will **gather** the people and **raise up** faithful leaders. (23:3-4)
  - a. It's God's initiative – He drove them out of the land and He will gather them.
  - b. Exile
    - i. By this point in history, the northern kingdom, Israel, has already been scattered for more than 120 years. They were taken into exile in 722 BC by Assyria.
    - ii. By the end of Jeremiah's tenure as a prophet, the southern kingdom, Judah, will be taken into exile in 586 BC by Babylon, the successor world power.

- c. God will bring them back and raise up shepherds over them who will tend them.
  - i. In 539 BC, the Persians overthrew the Babylonians and the Persian King, Cyrus, began returning the Jewish people back to their land.
  - ii. Just as God used a foreign king to discipline the people, so He used a foreign king to return the people.
  - iii. And He raised up some good leaders over them – Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah.
- d. The return under Cyrus and the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were small fulfillments that anticipated the greater promise of vv. 5-8.
  - i. They were the near-term fulfillment that anticipated a far fulfillment, they were the appetizer that anticipated the main course.
  - ii. These faithful leaders anticipated a still greater leader, the Messiah.

3. Jesus is the promised righteous ***King*** of a greater ***return***. (23:5-8)

- a. For David a righteous branch
  - i. God had promised David that He would have a descendent who would reign on his throne forever (2 Sam 7:12-13)
  - ii. Isaiah promised that a Son would be given to the people who would fulfill this:
    - 1. **Isaiah 9:6-7** For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.
  - iii. He further promised it will come from David's family in Isaiah 11:1
    - 1. **Isaiah 11:1** Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.
  - iv. This is why there is such interest in the NT gospels in the genealogy of Jesus. They are showing that He is in this line of David. He is fulfilling the promise of a righteous branch from David.
- b. He will reign as King, but His rule will be very different than what has been described in Jeremiah so far.
  - i. He will act wisely – wonderful counselor
  - ii. He will do justice and righteousness – prince of peace
- c. As a result the people will be saved and well securely.
  - i. This is clearly more than the small, almost pitiful return under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah that only involved a fraction of the people in a very tenuous peace underneath the thumb of the Persian empire.
- d. His name by which He will be called is “The LORD our righteousness.”
  - i. Play on the name of the final king of Judah whose name is Zedekiah, which means “the Lord is my righteousness,” but Zedekiah is anything but righteous.

- ii. Zedekiah's reign is summarized in 2 kings 22:19 as "He did evil in the sight of the Lord." His name may have been promising, but his rule was one more disappointment.
- iii. This promised king will be a righteous king, a good shepherd.
- iv. Consider again the language from Matthew 2 that quotes Micah 5
  - 1. **Matthew 2:5-6** They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet: <sup>6</sup> 'AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.'"
- e. Isn't that still what we want, a good shepherd?
  - i. **John 10:11** "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.
  - ii. **John 10:14** "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me,
  - iii. We have political leaders that sometimes encourage us and sometimes discourage us, but even the best are flawed.
  - iv. We have spiritual leaders, pastors and elders, that serve as under shepherds of the Good Shepherd, but are flawed.
    - 1. If I have disappointed you yet, just give it some more time.
  - v. But that only highlights the perfection of our Good Shepherd, who rules over us now and will rule in a literal kingdom that is still future.
- f. Jesus the Messiah-King will return His people and rule over them on their own soil. (vv. 7-8)
  - i. He repeats the phrase in v. 7 "behold, the days are coming", indicating a fulfillment that coincides with the days of vv. 5-6.
  - ii. The deliverance will be greater than that from Egypt, so much so that they won't even talk about the deliverance from Egypt.
  - iii. They will be brought back to live on their own soil, the land their own land which I gave to their fathers, the Lord says in Jer. 16:15 in a nearly identical passage.
  - iv. We see in this a literal, still future restoration of the scattered Jewish people to the land under the righteous rule of Christ in the millennial kingdom.
    - 1. Sure, Israel was reestablished as a nation in 1946, but that is not yet the fulfillment if this promise. Jesus is not ruling as their righteous king. It isn't a time of peace, far from it.
    - 2. But it is a reminder that God is preserving the Jewish people and will one day do a great work of bringing many to faith in Jesus as the Messiah.
- g. Jesus is "The Lord our righteousness"
  - i. Not merely *the Lord who is righteous*, although that is true, but "our righteousness."
  - ii. That's how Jesus fulfills His name given in another classic passage that we read at Christmas:
    - 1. **Matthew 1:21** "She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."
  - iii. The Old Testament recognized that God is righteous but man is not.

1. **Psalms 14:3** They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.
  2. **Isaiah 64:6** For all of us have become like one who is unclean, And all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; And all of us wither like a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
- iv. The heart of the gospel is that Jesus is not merely our righteous king, He is our righteousness
1. **2 Corinthians 5:21** He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
  2. **Philippians 3:8-9** More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,



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