

**Jer. 23:1 ¶ Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD.**

**Jer. 23:2 Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD.**

As I read through this chapter a few times, it seems obvious to me that the “pastors” being referenced are those in positions of spiritual leadership over the people—the prophets and priests. Instead of functioning with the good of the people in mind, they had acted in ways that were detrimental to the spiritual growth of the people of Judah/Israel, God’s chosen people. Though in context Jeremiah is speaking to the people of Judah, the truth is just as applicable to the nation as a whole. The Hebrew for the word “scatter” states first of all “to dash in pieces.” In other words, the spiritual leaders were responsible for the spiritual destruction of the people.

Verse two is another statement of reaping what one sows. God is going to judge these “pastors” and repay them evil for evil.

**Jer. 23:3 And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.**

**Jer. 23:4 And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD.**

It’s interesting to note that the wording of this verse seems to jump forward in reference to the great dispersion of the Jewish people that was the ultimate result of the Roman takeover of the nation that began with the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. It was at this time that the Jewish people were scattered through the countries of the world for what would prove to be almost 2000 years. In fact, I think the time of restoration being referenced is yet future and will culminate in conjunction with the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, the 1000-year reign of Christ on the throne of David that precedes the final judgment of sin. It’s only at that time that the nation of Israel will once again be led by true shepherds, spiritual leaders that will nurture them. Only then will it be true that they will never again fear for their national well-being. Only then will they be fruitful and prosperous, lacking nothing.

“I have driven them” - The LORD is very clear in stating that His people were scattered throughout the nations as a result of His judgment of their sin. The leaders were responsible for leading the people into sin; the people were accountable for following their evil leaders in rejection of God’s covenant, and God stepped in with the judgment they deserved.

**Jer. 23:5 Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.**

**Jer. 23:6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

These verses are a declaration of the coming Messiah that would reign on the throne of David. The “righteous Branch” brings to mind the words of the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah.

*Isaiah 11:1–4 “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a **Branch** shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: **But with righteousness shall he judge** the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.”*

*Zechariah 6:12–13 “And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, **Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH;** and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, **and shall sit and rule upon his throne;** and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”*

It is pretty obvious to me that both sections of scripture are talking about the same person as Jeremiah—a man who will be both King and Priest in Israel. This will be a first in Israel’s history; no previous king of Israel/Judah was authorized by God to also serve as priest. He will rule on the throne of David with intelligence, wisdom and good success (from the Hebrew for prosper). Those in His kingdom will experience righteous government. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah make it clear that His earthly heritage is rooted in the family of King David. Jeremiah emphasizes that Judah/Israel will find deliverance and dwell safely in His kingdom. He will be known as “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS,” a title declaring His deity.

The passage in Isaiah not only verifies the earthly lineage of the Branch as a descendant of Jesse, David’s father, it also affirms His deity in that it only takes “the breath of his lips,” His word, to exercise judgment over the wicked.

An interesting side note—Based on Zechariah’s prophecy, I believe the millennial temple will be built under the direct supervision of the LORD Jesus.

**Jer. 23:7 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;**

**Jer. 23:8 But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.**

When the Lord Jesus is on the throne of David, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt by means of amazing miracles will be little thought of in comparison to

the amazing regathering of the believing remnant that will take place at the inception of His kingdom. Point is made that the people will be regathered from all over the world.

Jeremiah again emphasizes that the people are scattered as a result of God's judgment and will be regathered as a direct result of His actions on their behalf. No longer will the nations argue as to the right of the Jewish people to dwell in their own land. This truth was also declared by the Ezekiel.

*Ezekiel 34:11–14 “For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. **And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.”***

**Jer. 23:9 ¶ Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine hath overcome, because of the LORD, and because of the words of his holiness. Jer. 23:10 For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right.**

Jeremiah is declaring himself overcome in light of the awful judgment the LORD has declared against the prophets; he describes his reaction as one who is experiencing drunken tremors.

It is important to note that Jeremiah recognizes God's words of judgment as reflecting His holiness.

The wickedness of the people is obvious. The comparison to adultery pictures lack of faithfulness to the LORD, but it also describes the physical immorality rampant throughout the nation as part of their worship of false gods.

It seems that the land was experiencing the curse of God's judgment and was not very productive at this point in Jeremiah's ministry.

“their course is evil...” – Some of the translations are worded so as to be in specific reference to the prophets, but I think it is still in reference to the people as a whole.

**Jer. 23:11 For both prophet and priest are profane; yea, in my house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD. Jer. 23:12 Wherefore their way shall be unto them as slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them, even the year of their visitation, saith the LORD.**

It must have grieved the LORD greatly to have to declare the prophets and priests ministering at His holy temple as *profane*, morally corrupt. They should have been the greatest examples of obedience and faithfulness to God's covenant. After looking at the Hebrew, I think the LORD is declaring that these prophets and priest have fallen prey to their own deceptive practices. "Slippery" makes reference to flattery. It seems the more they prospered by flattering the people, by telling them what they wanted to hear, the more entrenched they became in their wickedness. Though they may think they are getting away with their actions, the LORD is clear in declaring that they will suffer under His hand of judgment.

Though we may not understand God's ways and why He chooses to postpone judgment at times, we can be sure that His ways and judgment are according to righteousness.

*Deuteronomy 32:4 "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he."*

*Jeremiah 9:24 "But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."*

**Jer. 23:13** And I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied in Baal, and caused my people Israel to err.

**Jer. 23:14** I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

King Omri, the father of Ahab, established Samaria as the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Just as with Judah, it was the prophets that led the people of the Northern Kingdom into idolatry, the worship of Baal. In spite of seeing how God judged the Northern Kingdom, the prophets of Jerusalem followed the adulterous example of the prophets of Samaria.

The worship of false gods always leads one into embracing immorality, lies and wickedness in general. It's also true that the wicked are quick to encourage others to join them in their evil activities. In the LORD's eyes, His people were just as wicked as those of Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Lot. In fact, according to Ezekiel, they were worse.

*Ezekiel 16:48–51 "As I live, saith the Lord GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good. Neither hath Samaria committed half of thy sins; but **thou hast multiplied thine abominations more than they**, and hast justified thy sisters in all thine abominations*

*which thou hast done."*

This truth is so apparent in today's culture. Those who embrace false religions are passionate about recruiting others to join with them. What they can't accomplish through deceit and/or by appealing to the flesh, they often try to accomplish by intimidation or force. I think it is significant to note what God identified as the sin of Sodom—reveling in pride, prosperity and idleness while ignoring the needs of the poor and committing abomination before Him. More often than not it is homosexuality that is singled out in reference to the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was actually a culture of pride, prosperity, idleness and selfishness that resulted in their decline into moral decadence.

(6/11) Pride is evidenced by a culture that promotes satisfying and serving self. Prosperity is evidenced by how much we have in excess of true need. Idleness is often directly connected to wealth and the ability to indulge ourselves according to our desires. Selfishness is at the root of turning healthy pride into unhealthy, arrogant pride, the motive for misusing our prosperity and showing insensitivity to the needs of others, and the determining factor behind how we utilize "idleness," the time we have available beyond that necessary to providing for our needs.

The warning signs are flashing more brightly and intensely than ever before in my lifetime in America and the world as a whole.

**Jer. 23:15 Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall: for from the prophets of Jerusalem is profaneness gone forth into all the land.**

"Therefore..." – Based on everything I just said concerning the prophets....

*Wormwood* and *gall* are both references to poison. In other words, the LORD intends to destroy these false prophets in Jerusalem. They had poisoned the people, and God was going to poison them. In doing a word search I found a specific reference giving warning to one who would choose to "bear gall and wormwood" to the people.

*Deuteronomy 29:18–20 "Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst: The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven."*

**Jer. 23:16 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, Hearken not unto the words of the prophets that prophesy unto you: they make you vain: they speak a vision of**

**their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.**

**Jer. 23:17** They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you.

Jeremiah is declaring the LORD's warning for the people not to listen to the false prophets. The Hebrew for the word *vain* means to lead astray. The prophecies that they are declaring are a product of their own imagination and are not revelations from the LORD. In spite of evidence to the contrary, the false prophets continue to declare that God is going to give them peace and protect them from evil. Point is made that they are declaring their message to be from the LORD while delivering it to people who have rejected the LORD and are following after the desires of their own heart rather than acting in submission and obedience to YHWH. They were lying and the people loved to have it so.

*Jeremiah 5:31 "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so...."*

This is still a very perplexing truth in great evidence today. People want to live according to the dictates of their own heart yet feel they are being blessed by God. It doesn't matter that their actions are in direct conflict with God's revealed truth. False teachers abound who will stress the truth of God's love while ignoring the truth of His hatred of sin and His declared intention to judge the sinner. Only by submission to Jesus as LORD and accepting His gift of redemption by grace through faith can the sinner escape judgment.

I really like this quote from Scribner's Bible Commentary: "Here we have the principal earmark of false teaching. False prophets, or teachers, always speak words that quiet the conscience, promise all kinds of good things, and violate with impunity the laws of morality."

**Jer. 23:18** For who hath stood in the counsel of the LORD, and hath perceived and heard his word? who hath marked his word, and heard it?

I think the NLT expresses the intent of this verse quite clearly: "But can you name even one of these prophets who knows the LORD well enough to hear what he is saying? Has even one of them cared enough to listen?"

By posing the question it seems that Jeremiah is making an indictment against the public persona of these prophets—their character and lifestyle.

**Jer. 23:19** Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD is gone forth in fury, even a grievous whirlwind: it shall fall grievously upon the head of the wicked.  
**Jer. 23:20** The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly.

Jeremiah declares that they will soon see evidence of the LORD's fury, which he pictures as a violent storm being unleashed against the wicked. This storm will

not abate until it has accomplished the LORD's purposes. This again reminds me of a verse in Isaiah.

*Isaiah 14:24 "The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand...."*

I think that in context regarding the judgment of these false prophets the "latter days" is a general reference to the future after looking at the Hebrew. The NIV translates it: "*In days to come you will understand it clearly.*"

**Jer. 23:21 I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied.**

**Jer. 23:22 But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.**

Again the LORD declares through Jeremiah that these false prophets were not prophesying according to His revelation to them. If they had delivered His message, they would have been urging the people to turn from their evil ways and follow YHWH in obedience and faith.

That is still true today. A true prophet, a forthteller of the truth, will declare the whole counsel of God. He/she will declare that God is love, but that He hates sin. He will warn against sin as defined in scripture as well as of the consequences of that sin. He will teach us how to live so as to bring honor to God and be able to claim the promises that bring comfort to the believer. He will be truthful regarding the tribulation that the believer can expect in this life while assuring us that God will be with us to strengthen and encourage us through those tribulations. He will teach us to recognize the seduction and deceit of the enemy and equip us to be overcomers through appropriating the Word of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

**Jer. 23:23 Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?**

**Jer. 23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD.**

At this point the LORD makes use of some questions that are intended to make His people think about Who He is. They are intended to emphasize the fact that He is not limited by time or distance, as are we. He is both omniscient and omnipresent—terms that we can define but not truly understand. Omniscience speaks of His knowing everything about everyone and everything, and omnipresence means that He is everywhere present at the same time. One of my favorite chapters in scripture affirms this truth.

*Psalms 139:1–12 "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compasses my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for*

*me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee."*

**Jer. 23:25** I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

**Jer. 23:26** How long shall *this* be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart;

**Jer. 23:27** Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal.

The LORD is basically declaring to the prophets that He is totally aware of their actions. They are deceiving the people by telling them that they are getting revelations from God in their dreams. They then proceed to prophesy lies according to what the people want to hear. Though they identify themselves as prophets of God, their messages are intended to turn the people away from God and serve idols just like their fathers before them did.

I can't help but make a connection to those that call themselves "Christian" pastors/leaders today that do the very same thing. They boldly declare their heresy in the name of God while contradicting the word of God. In the process they are leading people into confusion and/or eternal condemnation.

**Jer. 23:28** The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD.

**Jer. 23:29** *Is not* my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer *that* breaketh the rock in pieces?

In these verses the LORD is basically declaring that there is a big difference between a true prophet of God and a false prophet. The true prophet of God who is faithful to declare the word of God is likened to wheat, and the message of the false prophet to chaff, the worthless refuse of the wheat plant.

The LORD declares His word to be powerful and effective—like a fire and strong hammer. His words are like a refining fire and can penetrate the hardest heart.

*Hebrews 4:12* "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

The word of the false prophet, however, will always be proven wrong; and those that heed his message will inevitably suffer as a result.

**Jer. 23:30** Therefore, behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbour.

**Jer. 23:31** Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith.

**Jer. 23:32** Behold, I *am* against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD.

At this point YHWH emphatically denounces the false prophets. By feeding the people lies, they are in effect stealing God's truth from the people. By prophesying a message contrary to God's truth, they lead the people into sin. Their lives project an attitude of unconcern regarding the poor spiritual condition of the people. He emphasizes again that the false prophets are independent operators; He did not send them out with His message.

It seems many of the translators understand verse 30 to be saying that the false prophets get their messages from one another and then proclaim them as a word from God. Reasonable, but not the first thoughts in my mind. I'm sticking with my first understanding as a better fit in context.

**Jer. 23:33** ¶ And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD.

**Jer. 23:34** And *as for* the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house.

**Jer. 23:35** Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken?

**Jer. 23:36** And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God.

It is obvious that the LORD is affirming Jeremiah as His true prophet through the message being delivered. It sounds as though verse 33 is directed to Jeremiah. The instruction—If anyone asks you about God's latest revelation to you, you are to answer that the LORD has abandoned them and tell them nothing else. God has determined to punish any person who claims to have a message from Him. The people might as well recognize that what they have to say will be a message of their own invention since they have chosen to lie and pervert the words of the living God. They have no authority from God.

I think JFB gave a better summary on this section: "Jeremiah indignantly repeats their own question, Do you ask, What burden? This, then, it is, "I will forsake you." My word is burdensome in your eyes, and you long to be rid of it. You shall get your wish. There will be no more prophecy: *I will forsake you*, and that will be a far worse "burden" to you."

**Jer. 23:37** Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the LORD answered thee? and, What hath the LORD spoken?

**Jer. 23:38** But since ye say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD;

**Jer. 23:39** Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, *and cast you out of my presence:*

**Jer. 23:40** And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

The NIV is quite a bit clearer in its expression: *“This is what you keep saying to a prophet: ‘What is the LORD’s answer to you?’ or ‘What has the LORD spoken?’ Although you claim, ‘This is the oracle of the LORD,’ this is what the LORD says: You used the words, ‘This is the oracle of the LORD,’ even though I told you that you must not claim, ‘This is the oracle of the LORD.’ Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your fathers. I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace — everlasting shame that will not be forgotten.”*

The LORD is going to judge the false prophets and His people by casting them into exile in shame and disgrace. They had become a burden to Him by continual rejection of His “burdens” or words of truth and warning from His true prophet, Jeremiah.

“...everlasting shame...” – Throughout history the exiled Jewish people have suffered shame and disgrace. Yes, they have had their moments of respite and prosperity; but I would confidently declare that as a people as a whole, they have been made to serve, persecuted and destroyed because of God’s judgment in response to their rejection of Him as LORD.