

JEREMIAH 23: 1 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD.

Sequel of the discourse which commenced in the preceding chapter. The prophet denounces vengeance against the pastors of Israel who have scattered and destroyed the flock of the Lord, Jer 23:1, Jer 23:2. He concludes with gracious promises of deliverance from the Babylonish captivity, and of better times under the Messiah, when the converts to Christianity, who are the true Israel of God, shadowed forth by the old dispensation, shall be delivered, by the glorious light of the Gospel, from worse than Chaldean bondage, from the captivity of sin and death. But this prophecy will not have its fullest accomplishment till that period arrives which is fixed in the Divine counsel for the restoration of Israel and Judah from their various dispersions, of which their deliverance from the Chaldean domination was a type, when Jesus the Christ, the righteous Branch, the Root and Offspring of David, and the only legitimate Heir to the throne, shall take unto himself his great power, and reign gloriously over the whole house of Jacob, Jer 23:3-8. At the ninth verse a new discourse commences. Jeremiah expresses his horror at the great wickedness of the priests and prophets of Judah, and declares that the Divine vengeance is hanging over them. He exhorts the people not to listen to their false promises, Jer 23:9-22; and predicts the utter ruin that shall fall upon all pretenders to inspiration, Jer 23:23-32, as well as upon all scoffers at true prophecy, Jer 23:33-40.

Verse 1

Woe be unto the pastors - There shall a curse fall on the kings, princes, priests, and prophets; who, by their vicious conduct and example, have brought desolation upon the people.

JEREMIAH 23: 2 Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, against the shepherds who feed my people: You have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings, says the LORD.

Verse 2

You have scattered my flock - The bad government both in Church and State was a principal cause of the people's profligacy.

JEREMIAH 23: 3 I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

JEREMIAH 23: 4 I will set up shepherds over them, who shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking, says the LORD.

JEREMIAH 23: 5 Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Verse 5

I will raise unto David a righteous Branch - As there has been no age, from the Babylonish captivity to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, in which such a state of prosperity existed, and no king or governor who could answer at all to the character here given, the passage has been understood to refer to our blessed Lord, Jesus Christ, who was a branch out of the stem of Jesse; a righteous king; by the power of his Spirit and influence of his religion reigning, prospering, and executing judgment and justice in the earth.

JEREMIAH 23: 6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name by which he shall be called: the LORD our righteousness.

Verse 6

In his days Judah shall be saved - The real Jew is not one who has his circumcision in the flesh, but in the spirit. The real Israel are true believers in Christ Jesus; and the genuine Jerusalem is the Church of the first-born, and made free, with all her children, from the bondage of sin, Satan, death, and hell. All these exist only in the days of the Messiah. All that went before were the types or signifiers of these glorious Gospel excellencies.

And this is his name whereby he shall be called The Lord Our Righteousness - I shall give the Hebrew text of this important passage: יהוה צדקנו יקראו שמו אשר וזה vezeh shemo asher yikre'o Yehovah tsidkenu, which the Septuagint translate as follows, Καὶ τοῦ τοῦ ὀνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ καλεσσεῖ αὐτὸν Κύριος, ἰωσεδεκ, "And this is his name which the Lord shall call him Josedek." Dahler translates the text thus: -

Et voici le nom dont on l'appellera:

L'Eternel, Auteur de notre felicite. "And this is the name by which he shall be called;

The Lord, the Author of our happiness."

Dr. Blayney seems to follow the Septuagint; he translates thus, "And this is the name by which Jehovah shall call him, Our Righteousness."

In my old MS. Bible, the first English translation ever made, it is thus: -

And this is the name that thei schul clepen him: oure rigtwise Lord.

Coverdale's, the first complete English translation of the Scriptures ever printed, (1535), has given it thus: -

And this is the name that they shall call him: even the Lorde oure rightuous Maker.

Matthews (1549) and Becke (1549) follow Coverdale literally; but our present translation of the clause is borrowed from Cardmarden, (Rouen, 1566), "Even the Lord our righteousness."

Dr. Blayney thus accounts for his translation: - "Literally, according to the Hebrew idiom, 'And this is his name by which Jehovah shall call, Our Righteousness;' a phrase exactly the same as, 'And Jehovah shall call him so;' which implies that God would make him such as he called him, that is, our Righteousness, or the author and means of our salvation and acceptance. So that by the same

metonymy Christ is said to 'have been made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,' 1Cor 1:30. "I doubt not that some persons will be offended with me for depriving them, by this translation, of a favourite argument for proving the Divinity of our Savior from the Old Testament. But I cannot help it; I have done it with no ill design, but purely because I think, and am morally sure, that the text, as it stands, will not properly admit of any other construction. The Septuagint have so translated before me, in an age when there could not possibly be any bias or prejudice either for or against the fore-mentioned doctrine, a doctrine which draws its decisive proofs from the New Testament only."

Dahler paraphrases, - "This Prince shall be surnamed by his people, 'The Lord, the author of our happiness.' The people shall feel themselves happy under him; and shall express their gratitude to him."

I am satisfied that both the translation from Cardmarden downwards, and the meaning put on these words, are incorrect. I prefer the translation of Blayney to all others; and that it speaks any thing about the imputed righteousness of Christ, cannot possibly be proved by any man who understands the original text. As to those who put the sense of their creed upon the words, they must be content to stand out of the list of Hebrew critics. I believe Jesus to be Jehovah; but I doubt much whether this text calls him so. No doctrine so vitally important should be rested on an interpretation so dubious and unsupported by the text. That all our righteousness, holiness, and goodness, as well as the whole of our salvation, come by Him, from Him, and through Him, is fully evident from the Scriptures; but this is not one of the passages that support this most important truth. See on Jeremiah 33 (note).

JEREMIAH 23: 7 Therefore behold, the days come, says the LORD, that they shall no more say, As the LORD lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

Verse 7

The Lord liveth which brought up - See on Jer 16:14 (note), Jer 16:15 (note).

JEREMIAH 23: 8 but, As the LORD lives, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries where I had driven them. They shall dwell in their own land.

JEREMIAH 23: 9 Concerning the prophets. My heart within me is broken, all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of his holy words.

Verse 9

Mine heart within me is broken because of the prophets - The first word of this clause is לנבאים *lannebiim*, which we incorporate with the whole clause, and translate, "Because of the prophets." But as a new prophecy begins here, it is evident that the word is the title to this prophecy; and is thus distinguished both by Blayney and Dahler, Concerning The Prophets. This discourse was delivered probably in the reign of Jehoiakim.

All my bones shake - He was terrified even by his own message, and shocked at the profanity of the false prophets.

JEREMIAH 23: 10 For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourns; the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right;

Verse 10

The land is full of adulterers - Of idolaters. Of persons who break their faith to ME, as an impure wife does to her husband.

The pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up - He speaks here, most probably, in reference to dearth. Profane oaths, false swearing, evil courses, violence, etc., had provoked God to send this among other judgments; see Jer 23:19.

JEREMIAH 23: 11 for both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in my house have I found their wickedness, says the LORD.

Verse 11

In my house - They had even introduced idolatry into the Temple of God!

JEREMIAH 23: 12 Therefore their way shall be to them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein; for I will bring evil on them, even the year of their visitation, says the LORD.

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

Verse 13

I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria - This was not to be wondered at, for their religion was a system of corruption.

JEREMIAH 23: 14 In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one returns from his wickedness: they have all become to me as Sodom, and its inhabitants as Gomorrah.

Verse 14

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem - That is, the prophets of Jerusalem, while professing a pure faith, have followed the ways, and become as corrupt as the prophets of Samaria.

They are all of them unto me as Sodom - Incurrible, brutish sinners, who will as surely be destroyed as Sodom and Gomorrah were.

JEREMIAH 23: 15 Therefore thus says the LORD of Armies concerning the prophets: Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.

JEREMIAH 23: 16 Thus says the LORD of Armies, Don't listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you: they teach you vanity; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD.

Verse 16

Hearken not unto the words of the prophets - That is, of those who promise you safety, without requiring you to forsake your sins and turn unto the Lord; see Jer 23:17.

JEREMIAH 23: 17 They say continually to those who despise me, the LORD has said, You shall have peace; and to everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come on you.

JEREMIAH 23: 18 For who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should perceive and hear his word? who has marked my word, and heard it?

Verse 18

Who hath stood in the counsel of the Lord - Who of them has ever received a word of prophecy from me? My word is not in them.

JEREMIAH 23: 19 Behold, the LORD's storm, his wrath, has gone out. Yes, a whirling storm. It shall burst on the head of the wicked.

Verse 19

Behold, a whirlwind - The simoom: the hot pestilential wind blowing from the south, frequently mentioned or referred to in the sacred writings; see Jer 23:10.

JEREMIAH 23: 20 the LORD's anger shall not return, until he has executed, and until he have performed the intents of his heart: in the latter days you shall understand it perfectly.

Verse 20

In the latter days ye shall consider it - I give you warning: and this punishment which I now threaten shall surely take place; a short time will determine it; ye shall not escape.

JEREMIAH 23: 21 I sent not these prophets, yet they ran: I didn't speak to them, yet they prophesied.

Verse 21

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran - Not to save souls, but to profit themselves.

I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied - They never received the word at my mouth; yet they went, publishing their own deceits, and pretending them to be revelations from God. The churches which have legal emoluments are ever in danger of being overrun and ruined by worldly and self-interested priests.

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

JEREMIAH 23: 23 Am I a God at hand, says the LORD, and not a God afar off?

Verse 23

Am I a God at hand, - and not a God afar off? - You act as if you thought I could not see you! Am I not omnipresent? Do not I fill the heavens and the earth? Jer 23:24.

JEREMIAH 23: 24 Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says the LORD. Don't I fill heaven and earth? says the LORD.

JEREMIAH 23: 25 I have heard what the prophets have said, who prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed.

JEREMIAH 23: 26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, even the prophets of the deceit of their own heart?

JEREMIAH 23: 27 who think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers forgot my name for Baal.

Verse 27

Bay their dreams - Dreams were anciently reputed as a species of inspiration; see Num 12:6; 1Sam 28:6; Joe 3:1; Dan 7:1. In the Book of Genesis we find many examples; and although many mistook the workings of their own vain imaginations in sleep for revelations from God, yet he has often revealed himself in this way: but such dreams were easily distinguished from the others. They were always such as had no connection with the gratification of the flesh; they were such as contained warnings against sin, and excitements to holiness; they were always consecutive - well connected, with a proper beginning and ending; such as possessed the intellect more than the imagination. Of

such dreams the Lord says, (Jer 23:28): The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream - permit him to show what he has thus received from the Lord: but let him tell it as a dream, and speak my word faithfully, lest he may have been deceived.

JEREMIAH 23: 28 The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat? says the LORD.

Verse 28

What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord - Do not mingle these equivocal matters with positive revelations. Do not consider a dream, even from a prophet, as that positive inspiration which my prophets receive when their reason, judgment, and spiritual feelings are all in full and in regular exercise. Mix none of your own devices with my doctrines.

JEREMIAH 23: 29 Isn't my word like fire? says the LORD; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

Verse 29

Is not my word like as a fire? - It enlightens, warms, and penetrates every part. When it is communicated to the true prophet, it is like a fire shut up in his bones; he cannot retain it, he must publish it: and when published, it is like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces; it is ever accompanied by a Divine power, that causes both sinner and saint to feel its weight and importance.

In the original words there is something singular: הלוֹא כֹה דְבַרִי כֹאשׁ halo coh debari kaesh, "Is not thus my word like fire?" I suspect, with Dr. Blayney, that כֹה coh, thus, was formerly written כֹח coach, strength or power; and so it was understood by the Targumist: "Are not all my words strong, like fire?" and probably the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews read it thus, and had it in view when he wrote: "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword," Heb 4:12. This admitted, the text would read, "Is not my word powerful, like fire?" or, "Is not the power of my word like fire?" But however we understand the words, let us take heed lest we think, as some have thought and affirmed, that the sacred writings are quite sufficient of themselves to enlighten, convince, and convert the soul, and that there is no need of the Holy Spirit. Fire itself must be applied by an agent in order to produce its effects; and surely the hammer cannot break the rock in pieces, unless wielded by an able workman. And it is God's Spirit alone that can thus apply it; for we find it frequently read and frequently spoken, without producing any salutary effects. And by this very thing the true preachers of the word of God may be distinguished from the false, non-commissioned ones; those who run, though they are not sent, Jer 23:21. The word of him who has his commission from heaven shall be as a fire and as a hammer; sinners shall be convinced and converted to God by it. But the others, though they steal the word from their neighbor - borrow or pilfer a good sermon, yet they do not profit the people at all, because God did not send them, Jer 23:32; for the power of God does not in their ministry accompany the word.

There may be an allusion to the practice in some mining countries, of roasting stones containing ore, before they are subjected to the hammer, in order to pulverize them. In Cornwall I have seen

them roast the tin stones in the fire, before they placed them under the action of the hammers in the stamp mill. The fire separated the arsenic from the ore, and then they were easily reduced to powder by the hammers of the mill; afterwards, washing the mass with water, the grains of tin sank to the bottom, while the lighter parts went off with the water, and thus the metal was procured clean and pure. If this be the allusion, it is very appropriate.

JEREMIAH 23: 30 Therefore behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who steal my words everyone from his neighbour.

Verse 30

I am against the prophets - Three cases are mentioned here which excited God's disapprobation:

1. The prophets who stole the word from their neighbor; who associated with the true prophets, got some intelligence from them, and then went and published it as a revelation which themselves had received, Jer 23:30.
 2. The prophets who used their tongues; הלִקְחִים לְשׁוֹנָם hallokechim leshonam, who lick or smooth with their tongues - gave their own counsels as Divine revelations, flattering them in their sins, and promising peace, when God had not spoken; and prefaced them, "Thus saith the Lord," Jer 23:31.
 3. The prophets who made up false stories, which they termed prophecies, revealed to them in dreams; and thus caused the people to err, Jer 23:32.
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JEREMIAH 23: 31 Behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their tongues, and say, He says.

JEREMIAH 23: 32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their vain boasting: yet I didn't send them, nor commanded them; neither do they profit this people at all, says the LORD.

JEREMIAH 23: 33 When this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask you, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? Then you shall tell them, What burden! I will cast you off, says the LORD.

Verse 33

What is the burden of the Lord? - The word מַשָּׂא massa, here used, signifies burden, oracle, prophetic discourse; and is used by almost every prophet. But the persons in the text appear to have been mockers. "Where is this burden of the Lord?" - "What is the burden now?" To this insolent question the prophet answers in the following verses.

I will ever forsake you - I will punish the prophet, the priest and the people, that speak thus, Jer 23:34. Here are burdens.

JEREMIAH 23: 34 As for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, who shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house.

JEREMIAH 23: 35 You shall say everyone to his neighbour, and everyone to his brother, What has the LORD answered? and, What has the LORD spoken?

JEREMIAH 23: 36 You shall mention the burden of the LORD no more: for every man's own word shall be his burden; for you have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of Armies our God.

Verse 36

Every man's word shall be his burden - Ye say that all God's messages are burdens, and to you they shall be such: whereas, had you used them as you ought, they would have been blessings to you.

For ye have perverted the words of the living God - And thus have sinned against your own souls.

JEREMIAH 23: 37 You shall say to the prophet, What has the LORD answered you? and, What has the LORD spoken?

JEREMIAH 23: 38 But if you say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus says the LORD: Because you say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent to you, saying, You shall not say, The burden of the LORD;

JEREMIAH 23: 39 therefore, behold, I will utterly forget you, and I will cast you off, and the city that I gave to you and to your fathers, away from my presence:

Verse 39

I will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you and the city - Dr. Blayney translates: - I will both take you up altogether, and will cast you off together with the city. Ye are a burden to me: but I will take you up, and then cast you off. I will do with you as a man weary with his burden will do; cast it off his shoulders, and bear it no more.

JEREMIAH 23: 40 and I will bring an everlasting reproach on you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

Verse 40

I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you - And this reproach of having rebelled against so good a God, and rejected so powerful a Savior, follows them to this day through all their dispersions, in every part of the habitable earth. The word of the Lord cannot fail.