

The Righteous Branch

23: 1-8

DIG: Who are the shepherds? In what ways did the leaders of Judah exploit the people? How were they scattering the flock? What caused them to stop trusting YHVH? What will the LORD do to them? What new shepherds and righteous Branch will God appoint (Isaiah 11:1-2)? Zedekiah is Hebrew for *ADONAI my righteousness*. What is the significance of the future King's title? What historical benchmarks define Isra'el as a nation? Why is one more significant than the other?

REFLECT: Jesus applied this shepherd imagery to Himself. How does He fulfill this promise to you? Which title, name or role of Yeshua is most special to you? Hope shines in even the darkest chapters in Isra'el's history. How does hope shine for you?

597 BC during the eleven-year reign of Zedekiah

Now **Jeremiah** gives us a different picture. The branch of David through **Jechoniah** had been "cut off" (see **Dv - The Curse of Jeconiah, Also Known as Jehoiachin or Coniah**). However, **God** promised to raise up to **David** another **King** who would be a **righteous Branch**, that is, another member of the Davidic line. **Jesus Christ** is the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Jeremiah begins with a negative contrast before moving to the positive and describes the wicked leaders of his day. Under their **evil leadership** the people **abandoned the ways of righteousness and suffered exile**. It is noteworthy that in the final analysis the **transgressions of the nation are attributed to their leaders**. Inspired by the **Ruach HaKodesh**, the prophet declares: **Woe to the shepherds, including King Zedekiah and the nobles who seemed to dominate him, who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture (23:1)**! But this term may be more comprehensive to include a long list of inept, careless, and neglectful **shepherds** for so many years past.²⁴⁶

Therefore, this is what **ADONAI**, the God of Isra'el, says to the shepherds who tend **My people**. "Because you have scattered **My flock** and driven them away (into exile) and have not watched over them, but I am watching you to punish you for the evil you have done," declares **Ha'Shem** (23:2). Because they did not watch over the people, God will judge them for the evil they had done in fulfillment of His threat (**Deuteronomy 28:15ff**).

Throughout Jewish history, the Exodus has been considered the high point; but after the final regathering that perception will change. Yirmeyahu promised a much greater regathering of the Jews . . . a greater miracle than their deliverance from Egypt. **A Righteous Ruler will ensure them tranquility and safety. The hope of God is not nullified because of Judah's failure.** I Myself will gather what remains of My flock from all the countries (plural) where I have driven them (see Gt - **In the Thirty-Seventh Year of the Exile Jehoiachin was Released from Prison**) and bring them back (**shuwb**) to their homes, and they will be fruitful and increase their numbers. I will appoint shepherds over them who will truly shepherd them; then they will no longer be afraid or disgraced; and none will be missing **unlike sheep carried off by beasts of prey through their shepherd's neglect** (23:3-4 CJB).

The new community that YHVH will gather is a real historical fact. The hope of the united Kingdom of Isra'el was, and is, concrete and offered against the devastation that would soon visit Tziyon. This regathering did not happen after the seventy-year captivity (see Gu - **Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**) because not all the Jews returned from Babylon. And in 70 AD the Israelites were scattered all over the world. That diaspora continues today, and awaits the arrival of the righteous Branch.

But in contrast to the unhappy past, a messianic prophecy of hope for the future is spoken. The days are coming. When Jeremiah (under the direction of the Holy Spirit) uses the phrase **in the days to come; the days are coming; in those days; in that day, at that time;** or **for the time will surely come,** the context points either to the **near historical future** or the **far eschatological future** and which one should be used. This is the eleventh of twenty-five times that Yirmeyahu uses one of **these phrases**.

The context here is in the **far eschatological future**, the days are coming says ADONAI when I will raise a righteous Branch for David. The branch (Hebrew: *tzemach*) never denotes a twig, or an individual branch of a tree, but a growth or sprout that grows directly from a root, forming a new, or second, plant or tree (**Genesis 19:25; Psalm 65:10; Isaiah 61:11; Ezeki'el 16:7, 17:9-10; Hosea 8:7**).²⁴⁷ It also emphasizes the humanity of the righteous Branch because He will be a descendant of David and sit on David's throne. He will not be like Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin or Zedekiah. He will reign as king and succeed, He will do what is just and right in the Land (23:5 CJB). He will be the One who ultimately fulfills God's covenant with David (**Second Samuel 7:5-16**). He will reign wisely (**Isaiah 11:1-2**). He will execute justice and righteousness. These were the two responsibilities of the house of David that Jeremiah talked about in 22:3. Where the kings listed above failed, this descendant of David will succeed.

The rabbis have always taken these verses as being messianic until recently. In the midrash in the book of Proverbs (which was assembled somewhere between 200 and 500 AD), the rabbis said that there were eight names given to the Mashiach. They included Shiloh, David, YHVH (in earlier Jewish writings the rabbis did apply the name YHVH to the Messiah based upon Jeremiah 23:5-8), and Branch (based upon Jeremiah 23:5). Midrash aggadah is a form of rabbinic literature. It is a form of storytelling that explores the ethics and values of biblical texts; whereas midrash halakha attempts to take biblical texts that are either general or unclear and to clarify what they mean.

Now Jeremiah turns to His deity. He not only sits on David's throne, but He brings salvation. Elsewhere in Jeremiah this was a promise only God could achieve. In His days the southern kingdom of Judah will be saved and the northern kingdom of Isra'el will live in safety (Romans 11:26). His deity is seen in His name, and the name given to Him will be ADONAI Tzidkenu, or, the LORD our righteousness (23:6 CJB). This King will embody righteousness, to which His very name will attest. It is perhaps intentional and ironic that the "real King" anticipated is called YHVH our righteousness (or ADONAI tzidkenu), while the last king of the line up to the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC was Zedekiah (or YHVH is righteous). The coming King will be genuine righteousness (tzedakah), whereas the remembered King Zedekiah did not embody righteousness at all. The coming King will embody the reality. The proposed name for the new King indicates that He will govern with justice (see the commentary on Revelation Fi - The Government of the Messianic Kingdom). This is considered such an important prophecy that it is repeated in 33:16.²⁴⁸

The rabbis also took this verse to be messianic. In the midrash on Lamentations the rabbis teach that YHVH is His name and is proved by the name: ADONAI our righteousness. The Talmud says the following three will be named with the Name of the Holy One blessed be He. The upright as it is said from Isaiah 43:7; the Mashiach as it is written from Jeremiah 23:6; and this His name where He shall be called the LORD our Righteousness. The midrash on Psalm 21:1 comments: ADONAI calls Messiah by His own name. What is His name? The answer is the LORD is a Man of Strength, and concerning the Messiah we read, the LORD our righteousness is His name.

If you ask a modern rabbi about this, how does he answer? The Masoretic vowel point does not allow for the word is in the phrase YHVH is our Righteousness. The rabbis usually respond, "When YHVH's name is used as part of a man's name only the first two letters are used. But all four letters are never used as the name of a man. But in the phrase YHVH is our Righteousness, all four letters are used. That is the issue that they see.

The King in verses 5 and 6 will accomplish the regathering of Isra'el in verses 3 and 4. "Therefore," says ADONAI: **the days are coming**. This is the twelfth of twenty-five times that Jeremiah uses one of **these phrases**. The context here is a **far eschatological future** prophecy about the messianic Kingdom. **The days are coming when people no longer swear, 'As ADONAI lives, who brought the people of Isra'el out of the land of Egypt,' but, 'As ADONAI lives, who brought the descendants of the house of Isra'el up from the Land of the north and from all the countries where I drove them' (23:7-8a CJB).**" The exodus will no longer be viewed as the high point of Jewish history. There will be a new high point, the worldwide regathering back to **the Promised Land by the Righteous King**. The final result will be at the end of **verse 8: Then they will live in their own Land** in the messianic Kingdom (**Isaiah Chapter 11; Ezekiel Chapters 34 and 37**). This is one of the most important passages in the book of Jeremiah.