

International Bible Lessons Commentary
Jeremiah 23:1-6; 33:14-18
International Bible Lessons
Sunday, August 19, 2012
L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, August 19, 2012**, is from **Jeremiah 23:1-6; 33:14-18**.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking

Further follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lessons Commentary* (formerly, *Bible Lesson Forum*) below. **Study Hints for Thinking Further** discuss the five questions below to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion; these hints are available on the **International Bible Lessons Commentary** website. For additional **International Bible Lesson Commentaries**, see the complete and comprehensive **International Bible Lessons Commentary Index**. The weekly **International Bible Lesson** is posted each Saturday before the lesson is scheduled to be taught at **<http://InternationalBibleLessons.org>** and in ***The Oklahoman*** newspaper.

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Jeremiah 23:1-6

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

The LORD told the prophet Jeremiah to warn the political and religious leaders and the people of the Kingdom of Judah (the southern kingdom) about His forthcoming punishment if they did not repent of their sins and turn back to God. By their selfish and unjust behavior, the leaders of the kingdom did not care about God's people, about teaching them to obey God, about leading them to obey God's moral laws through the just enforcement of God's laws. Instead, they themselves disobeyed God, robbed God's people materially and spiritually, and led them to worship idols – which eventually led to destruction.

(Jeremiah 23:2) Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD.

God labels the behavior of Israel's leaders as more than "unjust." God called their actions "evil" (which were of course "unjust"). These leaders did the opposite of what the LORD expected of them and what the people needed from them. The LORD identified himself specifically as "the God of Israel" – the God of all Jacob's descendents – the "God of the Bible" (as we might speak of the true God today). As Isaiah warned the Kingdom of Israel, the God of Israel

punished them through the Assyrian invasion in 722 BC. And as Jeremiah warned Judah, the God of Israel sent the false shepherds and many people of Judah into exile in Babylon in 587 BC (except for those who died in battle or by starvation first).

(Jeremiah 23:3) Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply.

After 70 years of exile in Babylon, God led His people (those left from the Kingdom of Judah) back to Jerusalem under godly leadership. By the time they returned, all of the evil shepherds had died. Through Jeremiah, God promised to bring “a remnant” or “a small number” (a “remnant” is a small piece of cloth left over from a larger piece of cloth after something has been made; such as, a dress or shirt) of faithful people back to the Promised Land. After 70 years of exile, they had learned to worship the true God only and He led them back home. The descendents of those God drove out of the Kingdom of Israel (the northern kingdom) in 722 BC, will also return home to the Promised Land. Some believe God began to bring His people back to begin the complete fulfillment of this prophecy in 1948, when the modern State of Israel was created.

(Jeremiah 23:4) I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

In beginning to fulfill this prophecy, after their time in exile two good shepherds stand out in the Old Testament. First, Ezra — the Book of Ezra describes how he led the Judean exiles back from Babylon to Jerusalem and enforced the observance of God's laws. Second, Nehemiah — the Book of Nehemiah describes how he returned and led the people to rebuild of the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah did not fear others, but trusted in God. He was not dismayed, and he rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem while overcoming much opposition from Judah's neighbors. Jesus also fulfilled this prophecy, and continues to do so in the lives of those who trust in Him.

(Jeremiah 23:5) The days are surely coming, says 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.

Though verses three and four were substantially fulfilled by Ezra and Nehemiah and Jesus the Messiah, verse five will not be fulfilled completely until Jesus the Messiah comes again. The "righteous branch" would be a descendent of King David. Jesus qualified in this respect (see Matthew 1:1). In all Jesus

did in His first coming, He demonstrated the qualities of leadership that verse five describes. Believers now long for His second coming to fulfill this prophecy over all the earth.

(Jeremiah 23:6) In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Jesus came to save His people from their sins. He accomplished this through His first coming by His death and resurrection, and by His sending the Holy Spirit to empower believers to obey His commands and teachings. He is the righteousness of believer’s through His cleansing them from sin and His empowering and indwelling them to obey God by His Spirit. When Jesus returns, His people will live in safety because of His righteous leadership and their righteous ways of living through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah 33:14-18

(Jeremiah 33:14) The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

God repeated His promise to Jeremiah to emphasize in the minds of believers what He intended to do in the future. God will fulfill His promises for He is

faithful, altogether righteous, almighty, and trustworthy. His promise was to both the northern and southern kingdoms, both Israel and Judah. His promise was to all the descendents of Jacob no matter where they had been scattered.

(Jeremiah 33:15) In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

The LORD once again promised that He would send the Messiah, “the righteous Branch,” and the Messiah would be a descendent of David. Though some claim a Davidic genealogy still exists up to this time for some people (such as some kings and queens), it is unlikely that anyone today could prove conclusively that he or she was a descendent of King David. The Bible shows that Jesus was a descendent of King David, and His genealogy could be looked up in the Temple records in Jerusalem prior to its destruction in 70 A.D. If Jesus were not a descendant of King David, it would have been proved by the priests through temple records before they crucified him (or at least during the apostles’ lifetime in order to discredit the Christian faith). That Jesus was a descendant of King David was never disputed. Jesus treated everyone He met, whether friend or enemy, with justice and righteousness. When He returns to earth, His just reign upon the earth will be noted for justice and righteousness.

(Jeremiah 33:16) In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: “The LORD is our righteousness.”

Jesus said when He came the first time that He would have brought peace to Jerusalem, if the religious leaders and people had not rejected him. Today, the Jews do not live in safety and people do not live righteously in Jerusalem or Judea. When Messiah Jesus returns, He will rule righteously and all people will live in safety.

(Jeremiah 33:17) For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel,

This promise will only be fulfilled politically when Jesus the Messiah returns to the Promised Land as He promised. Since Jesus reigns over all as the eternal God from His throne in heaven, this promise is fulfilled now; however, it is not visibly fulfilled in the sight of all people everywhere. We await the visible fulfillment when Jesus begins His eternal reign in Jerusalem.

(Jeremiah 33:18) and the levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to make grain offerings, and to make sacrifices for all time.

Even today some claim to be the descendents of Levi and therefore qualified to serve as Levitical priests. Samaritans still offer sacrifices according to Moses' law. I do not know how or when God intended to fulfill this promise. Some promises of God were conditional upon the obedience of God's people, so this promise may not be in effect any longer (since the people disobeyed God and their temple was destroyed in 70 AD). Since God established a new covenant (as Jeremiah promised) through the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and since Jesus came and served as the once for all sacrifice for our sins, and also serves as our great high priest according to the Book of Hebrews, the sacrifices mentioned here may now represent people giving sacrificially to promote the work of the LORD. The burnt offerings and grain offerings may refer to some feast days of God's people. We may not know in advance how God will fulfill His promises, but we do know that He will keep His word to us and explain the meaning and purposes of His promises. Some promises we will not understand until after Jesus returns.

Five Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. In what ways can failure or refusal to do your duty lead to harming others materially and spiritually.
2. How can spending time in exile sometimes help

God's people?

3. Why was God's promise through Jeremiah, that their exile would not last forever, important for God to make to His people?

4. Read Jeremiah 23:4 again. What three results will God's people experience when they are led by good shepherds? How did Jesus fulfill this promise?

5. Why can we trust God to keep all of His promises and prophecies?

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