

Jer 23:1-8, Oracle against the Pastors
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Overview

1. Chiastic structure
 - a) 22:3-9, General royal oracle, with hope of restoration
 - b) 22:10-12, 13-19, Two oracles vs. specific kings (Shallum and Jehoiakim)
 - c) 22:20-23, Personification of Jerusalem as woman
 - d) 22:24-30, Specific oracle vs. Coniah
 - e) 23:1-8, General oracle vs. pastors, with promise of restoration

2. 23:1-8 returns a general condemnation of the kings, this time under the figure of shepherds; cf. 2:8,26 to see this equivalence. As in 22:4, there is hope here of a Davidic restoration. But there is a difference. In 22:4, the restoration was conditional on a change by the leaders; here it is unconditional, in spite of their complete failure.

Structure:

- a) Jer. condemns the kings for two classes of failings. They have scattered the sheep, and have destroyed them by failing to care for them. Structured as a summary statement that is amplified.

 - b) Then he shows how the Lord will restore both failings. Again, uses amplification.
 - 1) 3-4 summarizes both aspects of the restoration.
 - 2) 5-6 develop the notion of good rule.
 - 3) 7-8 develop the notion of regathering from scattering.

 3. General application to watch: we are concerned about the role of elder rule in our church. The OT has examples of all three of the titles used for elders: elder, overseer, and (as here) pastor. By examining how the pastors failed in the OT, we can learn how they should function in the NT.
- A. **1-2, Condemnation of the Pastors**
A brief summary, then amplified chiastically.

1. The summary in v.1 has four terms, each of which invites our attention. Note the order, which will be reversed in the amplification.

*Woe to the shepherds
who destroy
and scatter
the sheep of my pasture.*

- a) "Woe to the shepherds": describes the result of their sin:

"Woe." This expression is originally a funeral cry; cf. 22:18 "ah." Here, it is a compact way of saying that the shepherds are dead meat.

- b) "Destroy and scatter": the sin for which they are judged.
 - 1) First sin: they destroy the sheep, cause them to perish. By implication, what a shepherd should do for the sheep is protect them from outside dangers.
 - 2) Second sin: they scatter the sheep. By contrast, a shepherd should keep the flock together, gather them into a safe fold, and if one is missing, go out and find it.
 - 3) We will see these two features over and over in this paragraph. It's worth noting at the outset that they correspond perfectly to the two great dangers that Paul pointed out to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:29,30, the dangers of wolves coming in to destroy and of false teachers scattering sheep away.
- c) "Sheep of my pasture": these sheep belong to God. They are his people, who have been entrusted to the shepherds. Thus their abuse of them is particularly heinous; it is the betrayal of a sacred trust.

2. 2 is the amplification, repeating these same four items, but in reverse order.

- a) The quotation formula in v.2 emphasizes that the ones for whom the shepherds care are "my [YHWH's] people" and "my flock." What a responsibility, to take care of the people of the God of the universe. Imagine what a great responsibility it is to be a babysitter for any family. Now imagine being the babysitter for the president of the US. This is even greater.
- b) The shepherds' twofold sin, in reverse order this time:
 - 1) Instead of gathering the flock, they have "scattered ... and driven them away." They have run into the midst of them waving sticks and shouting, to get them to run away! The reality behind the picture is probably how the kings introduced idolatry, starting with Solomon and his altars to the gods of his foreign wives, 1 Kings 11. Instead of herding God's people into safe folds, they have sent them chasing after false gods. Cf. Acts 20:30, where the church is scattered through the false teaching of those who draw people away after themselves.

Application: Pastors need to be careful that they do not lead the flock away from God, or let someone else lead them away from God through false teaching. Note that the "scattering" is NOT relative to the church, but to the Lord.

A whole congregation can stay together, and yet together be "scattered" by false doctrine; there are many such groups even in Ann Arbor. Conversely, it is not "scattering" when we, as a church, take a stand on obeying the Bible that has driven some folk away from us. Had Solomon refused to erect pagan altars, some of his wives might have left Israel, but that would hardly be "scattering." But we must be very careful that we are guilty of no personal offense in these issues, and that we do all we can to urge faithfulness on those who by their neglect of scripture wander away from us.

- 2) "You have not visited them." This verb is a tremendously complex one. It does not refer to dropping by someone's house, but rather takes on a number of meanings sharing the basic sense of "to determine someone's destiny." It is characteristically used of a judge in judging; of a military commander in ordering and commanding his men; and here, of a shepherd doing what shepherds do, ordering the sheep, identifying their problems, and taking steps to correct them. This is the passive action that leads to "destroy," v.1. By failing to care diligently for the sheep, the shepherds leave them open to destruction by predators.

Application: Pastors are not passive toward the flock. They must recognize problems among the sheep, diagnose them accurately, and take appropriate steps to correct them, thus "determining their destiny." Compare David fighting off the bear and the lion with his rod and sling.

- c) Finally, corresponding to "woe" in v.1, the Lord announces their judgment; "visit" again, this time in the sense of what judge does in handing down the appropriate sentence.

B. 3-8, Promise of Restoration

The end of v.2 told us what the Lord would do with the shepherds. How about the sheep? Will they continue to be mauled and scattered? No; he will regather them (correcting the scattering), and provide care for them (correcting the lack of pastoral care and the destruction). Here we find the positive example for our pastoral work.

Three paragraphs. The first promises gathering and shepherding, and the next two each amplify one of these, in chiastic order.

1. 3-4, Summary: The Lord promises to remedy both the scattering and the failure to shepherd.

a) 3 summarizes the gathering.

- 1) "I" is emphatic: "As for me, I will gather" The Lord is contrasting what he will do with what the false pastors have done.

- 2) "... whither I have driven them." This is strange; in v.2 it

was the false pastors who scattered them. But consider the complexity: the false pastors led them astray after other gods, and in punishment God sent them into exile.

3) "their folds." Back into the land of Israel, as we see in the amplification, 7-8. There they will be fruitful and multiply.

b) 4 summarizes the active, proper shepherding. The Lord promises to set good shepherds over them. Because of their good rule, three things will not happen.

1) The sheep will no longer be afraid (of the wild beasts). The shepherds will protect them.

2) They will not be dismayed, terrified. Same idea, a bit stronger. Perhaps "afraid" is of the possibility that lion might come; "terrified" is in the face of his actual appearance.

3) They will not be lacking. The most serious result of wild animals could be their destruction, but this will not happen. NOTE: *pqd* for the third time, this time in an idiomatic sense "to be lacking."

2. 5-6, Amplification of the Shepherding.

4 promised, "I will set up shepherds" (plural). Now, using the same verb, God promises, "I will set up a legitimate offspring for David." What is the relation between this singular king and the plural ones in 4? Compare the singular and plural in 22:4. The singular is Messiah, and the plural refers to his lieutenants. These may include us, who will rule with him.

Note four details about his rule:

a) His *qualifications*: "a legitimate scion." Jeremiah did not invent this; it is known from pagan inscriptions in Cyprus. The point of "righteous" is not that the king is morally upright (though of course he is), but that he is legitimate, entitled to the throne. The suggestion is that the current Judean kings are not legitimate. They were set up by foreign powers, and were only puppets.

Application: Not anyone may be a pastor in God's church. Only those who meet the qualifications he has established can so serve; otherwise they are not "legitimate."

b) His *actions*: He will rule, prosper, and "execute judgment and righteousness." The current rulers "ruled," but could hardly be said to prosper, and explicitly did not "execute judgment and righteousness," 22:3.

Application: Elders need not apologize for giving clear

direction in line with God's word. They are not to "lord it over" the flock, 1 Pet. 5, but they are to lead clearly by their example.

- c) His *results*: Safety for his people, unlike the situation under Jer's contemporaries, whose carelessness left the sheep vulnerable to harm. Cf. the Lord's claim in John 17:12, "those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, except the son of perdition."

Application: Church leaders "watch for your souls, as those who must give account," Heb. 13:17.

- d) His *name*: "The Lord our Righteousness." Points in two ways to the Lord Jesus:

1) The title "Lord," here YHWH, emphasizes his deity. He is God.

2) The name reminds us that as believers our righteousness is not something that we generate ourselves, but is God's own righteousness, given to us freely from our Savior.

3. 7-8, Amplification of his Gathering.

We saw these verses before, at 16:14,15, one of the earliest glimpses of the hope of restoration in the book. The return from Egypt will be eclipsed by the return yet to come from this captivity.

C. Application:

1. *Doctrinal implications*: This is the kind of data that forms the basic foundation of millennial teaching.

a) The flock that is gathered is the remnant of the one that was scattered, 3a, not the gentiles. Cf. 8, "where I had driven them."

b) Note the emphasis on the land, v.8.

c) Could be the restoration under Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, but 5-6 seems clearly messianic, and beyond anything that Israel ever experienced.

d) Passages like these led the Christians of the first three centuries to believe in a national restoration of Israel. Not until Constantine did amillennialism become the predominant belief of the church.

2. *Ecclesiastical implications*: Once again, recall the two duties of the pastors, in which the last kings of Israel failed, and in which our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, succeeded.

- a) Gather the sheep; keep them focused on the Lord, and don't let them stray off.
- b) Tend them. Be on the watch for problems; address them when they arise.

Psalm 23

Analysis

Contrast p, between the sin of the pastors and the Lord's restoration. Note that each element of the contrast is a chiastic amplification paragraph.

A. text: ampl p: Woe + LAKEN "(AL pastors"

- 1. text: 23:1 HOWY RO(IYM M:)AB.:DIYM W./M:PICIYM)ET-CO)N
MAR:(IYT/IY N:)UM-Y:HWFH
- 2. ampl: quote p "concerning the pastors"
 - a) quote f: 23:2 LF/K"N K.OH-)FMAR Y:HWFH):ELOH"Y YI&:RF)"L
(AL-HF/RO(IYM HF/RO(IYM)ET-(AM./IY
 - b) quote:
 - 1) The sin of the pastors ("the pastors who...")
 - a>)AT./EM H:APICOTEM)ET-CO)N/IY
 - b> WA/T.AD.IXW./M
 - c> W:/LO) P:QAD:T.EM)OT/FM
 - 2) The Lord's judgment ("Woe"):
 - HIN/:NIY POQ"D (:AL"Y/KEM)ET-RO(A MA(AL:L"Y/KEM
 - N:)UM-Y:HWFH

B. contrast: ampl. p

Three paragraphs. The first promises gathering and shepherding, and the next two each amplify one of these, in chiastic order.

- 1. text: The Lord's promise to restore both the scattering and the failure to shepherd
 - a) 23:3 WA/):ANIY):AQAB."C)ET-\$.)"RIYT CO)N/IY MI/K.OL
HF/):ARFCOWT):A\$ER-HID.AX:T.IY)OT/FM \$FM
 - b) WA/H:A\$IBOTIY)ET/:HEN (AL-N:W"HEN
 - 1) W./PFRW.
 - 2) W:/RFBW.
 - c) 23:4 WA/H:AQIMOTIY (:AL"Y/HEM RO(IYM
 - 1) W:/RF(W./M
 - 2) W:/LO)-YIYR:)W. (OWD
 - 3) W:/LO)-Y"XAT.W.
 - 4) W:/LO) YIP.FQ"DW. N:)UM-Y:HWFH S
- 2. 5-6, ampl 1: temporal p: The Lord's shepherd
 - a) time: 23:5 HIN."H YFMIYM B.F)IYM N:)UM-Y:HWFH
 - b) text: WA/H:AQIMOTIY L:/DFWID CEMAX CAD.IYQ
 - 1) W./MFLAK: MELEK:
 - 2) W:/HI&:K.IYL
 - 3) W:/(F&FH MI\$:P.F+ W./C:DFQFH B.F/)FREC
 - 4) temporal p

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b> text:
  1> T.IW.F$A( Y:HW.DFH
  2> W:/YI&:RF)"L YI$:K.ON LF/BE+AX
5) W:/ZEH-$.:M/OW ):A$ER-YIQ:R:)/OW Y:HWFH CID:Q/"NW. S
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3. 7-8, ampl 2: temporal p: The Lord gathers them

a) time: 23:7 LF/K"N HIN."H-YFMIYM B.F)IYM N:)UM-Y:HWFH

b) text: contrast p

1) quote p:

a> quote f: W:/LO)-YO)M:RW. (OWD

b> quote: XAY-Y:HWFH):A\$ER HE(:ELFH)ET-B.:N"Y YI&:RF)"L
M"/)EREC MIC:RFYIM

2) quote p

a> quote f: 23:8 K.IY)IM-

b> quote: XAY-Y:HWFH):A\$ER HE(:ELFH WA/):A\$ER H"BIY)
)ET-ZERA(B."YT YI&:RF)"L M"/)EREC CFPOWNFH W./MI/K.OL
HF/):ARFCOWT):A\$ER HID.AX:T.IY/M \$FM W:/YF\$:BW.
(AL-)AD:MFT/FM S