

Jeremiah prophesied in Jerusalem through the reign of the final five kings of Judah leading up to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. This destruction was God's judgment upon the people for their sin and idolatry as described metaphorically in *Jeremiah 2:13* - "*For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*" Forsaking God as "*the fountain of living waters*" means rejecting God's way of salvation by His grace through the promised Messiah (the Lord Jesus Christ) Who is the water of life (*John 4:14; Rev. 22:1-2*), meaning that Christ is the only way of salvation, forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. Digging "*out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water*" means seeking their own ways of salvation by their works and their wills, which can never bring salvation to sinners. After Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed, the people were carried away into captivity to Babylon for 70 years. Jeremiah was taken to Egypt and died there. The following verses are words of judgment from God and words of encouragement to believe God.

**(Jer. 23:1-2)** - Jeremiah pronounced great sorrow and distress to come upon false prophets and false pastors. These false preachers are like those today who sincerely believe they are telling the truth and helping their hearers when, in reality and unwittingly, they are trying to destroy and scatter "*the sheep*" of God's pasture. So, the LORD promises that destruction and death would come upon these false preachers. We know that the TRUE sheep of God's pasture (God's kingdom, spiritual family, the true church) cannot be destroyed. They are all safe in Christ and will be brought to salvation and final glory because He protects and preserves them from all danger from Satan and his false preachers.

In all ages there have been false prophets and false preachers - "*wolves in sheep's clothing*" (*Matt. 7:15-16*). Here is what Jeremiah said of them in his day: (1) He charged them all with greed and covetousness (*6:13*); (2) He said they give people a false peace (*6:14*); (3) He charged them with denying God's judgment against sin (*14:13-14*); (4) Their message was not the word of God but rather their own thoughts (*23:16-17*); (5) They preached their dreams and visions and kept God's word from the people (*23:25-32*). The sad thing about this is that, because of the depravity and deceitfulness of the human heart, like today, the people preferred to hear the words of the false preachers rather than the word of God (*Jer. 5:31; 17:9; cf. John 5:43; 2 Tim. 4:3*).

**(Jer. 23:3-4)** - When we look about us at the vast religious landscape steeped in tradition, idolatry, and false doctrine, we see multitudes of people who claim to be Christians but who have no knowledge of the living God. They have no love for the Lord Jesus, and we know this because they have no love for the doctrine (truth) that identifies and distinguishes the true Christ in the glory of His Person and the power of His finished work (*1 John 4:1-3; 2 John 9*). We see that they give no evidence of the new birth, and no commitment to true holiness when they follow all of the popular preachers with their messages of salvation by works and free-will. We sometimes are made to wonder with Elijah, "Am I the only one left?" or to ask with the apostles, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" But here is the good news. God has an elect remnant whom He gave to Christ (*John 6:37-39; 17:2,9*). They were chosen and given to Him in eternity past (*Eph. 1:3-6; 2 Thess. 2:13*). Christ loved them and gave Himself for them (*John 10:14-16*). They are all justified, called, and shall be glorified (*Rom. 8:28-31*). God promises that they will be called out of all nations, and true shepherds and godly pastors would feed them with the truth, especially the truth of the Gospel of God's grace in Christ.

This is much like our day. There are many more false preachers than true preachers. And God has a remnant according to His election of grace who He will gather out of all nations and bring them to hear the true Gospel. He will give true pastors to lead them according to God's Word. Those whom the Father has chosen, those whom the Son has redeemed must be quickened by the Holy Spirit (*Eph. 2:1*) through the word (*James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23*) preached by faithful preachers (*Rom. 10:13-17*). All must be brought by God to hear the Gospel, repent, and believe that Gospel (*2 Thess. 2-13; Eph. 1:13-14; 1 Cor. 1:21; John 5:24; Rom. 1:16-17*). The true pastors shall comfort them with God's promises of grace and glory in Christ, establish them in the word of God. They shall all grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ through the word (*Eph. 4:11-15*).

**(Jer. 23:5-6)** - Here is the Gospel revealed in a prophecy of the glorious Person and accomplished work of the Messiah to come. Here is the summary of redemption and the one way that God can be a just God and a Savior (*Rom. 3:21-26*). "*Behold the days come*" - These are the days that God has appointed to send the Messiah into the world to do His great work (*Gal. 4:4-6*). The Lord will raise up "*unto David a righteous Branch*" - This refers to Christ's sinless humanity which will come from David's line (*Rom. 1:3*). He is God and man in one Person (*Isa. 7:14; 9:6-9; Rom. 1:4*). He "*shall reign and prosper*" as the King of kings. His kingdom will be established as He will "*execute judgment and justice in the earth.*" This describes His work as the Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer of all whom the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world. "*In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely*" - True Judah and Israel is not that Old Testament nation which was but a national people and a picture. True Israel, the true seed of Abraham, are the elect of God in Christ out of every nation on earth (*Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 3:7, 16, 26-29*). These shall all be saved and "*shall dwell safely*" forever and ever in the glory of God's eternal kingdom.

The Messiah's name "*shall be called, 'THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'*" This defines the salvation of sinners by God's grace based on the merits of Christ's righteousness imputed to them and which He accomplished by His obedience unto death as their Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer (*Rom. 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 2 Cor. 5:19-21*). This is also the name of Christ's bride (His church) and describes her union with Him (*cf. Jer. 33:15-16*). We who are saved by God's grace have no other righteousness upon which we can boast of salvation (*Gal. 6:14-16; Php. 3:3-9*). It is upon this one ground that God justifies the ungodly and by which God and sinners are reconciled (*2 Cor. 5:19-21*). This righteousness is the perfection of the law that can only be found in Christ (*Rom. 10:4*). It is applied to us by God imputing (charging) it to us (*Rom. 8:32-34; 4:6-8*). All true believers (sinners saved by grace) stand before God washed in the blood of Christ and clothed in His righteousness imputed. It is Christ as "*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*" from Whom God the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual life, knowledge, faith, and all the blessings and benefits of salvation that are applied to us in our new birth (*Rom. 5:17-21; 8:10*). It is this righteousness by which all people will be judged (*Acts 17:31*). All who are IN CHRIST shall be glorified with Him forever and ever. All who are without Christ shall be condemned and perish forever and ever.

**(Jer. 23:7-8)** - "*Behold the days come*" and are here in Christ when the people of God, redeemed by Christ and rejoicing in His grace, shall no more talk of the deliverance out of Egypt by the hand of Moses, but shall speak only of the Lord Jesus Christ our righteousness, Who has delivered us from the wrath to come by His precious blood. What is the earthly and temporary deliverance of slaves from Egypt when compared to the effectual spiritual and eternal deliverance of God's elect from the bondage of sin, from the curse of the law, and from the sting of death, through the Lord Jesus Christ (*1 Cor. 15:55-57*)?