

Jeremiah Chapter 23 Continued

Jeremiah 23:20 "The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly."

“Latter days”: They wouldn’t listen, but the day would come (verse 12), when the judgment would fall and then they would “understand”.

God will not recall His anger until He has carried out all of His wishes toward those who led His children astray. He executes judgement on those who have committed such grievous sins. It is not for us to question the judgements of God. At the end of time on this earth, the great judgement comes on all of mankind. That is the day of the separation of the sheep and the goats. God will gather His sheep to everlasting life with Him: the goats will be doomed to the lake of fire.

Verses 21-22: According to the Mosaic Law, these false prophets should have been stoned (compare Deut. 13:1-5; 18:20-22).

Jeremiah 23:21 "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied."

They might be sent of men, and be encouraged by them; but they were not sent of God. It is not only necessary that men employed in religious affairs should have an external call, in an orderly way, from the church of God. But also an internal call from the Lord himself. He qualifying them with gifts, putting his word into their mouths, and inclining their hearts to publish it (see Heb. 5:4). But these false prophets had no mission nor commission from the Lord, nor were they sent on any errand, or with any message from him.

"Yet they ran": Showed great diligence and zeal, and made haste to tell the people what the Lord had never said to them. But what were the warm imaginations of their own heads and hearts. They ran a race or course of ministry, but it was not good (as in Jer. 23:10). The Targum adds, "to do evil:"

"I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied": Wherefore what they prophesied was not the word of the Lord, but what they themselves devised. And so was what was false, as the Targum adds. It is a sad character of men when they speak in public neither by the will of God, nor according to the word of God.

These prophets, that have deceived the people, are not God's prophets. They were sent by the enemy to deceive the people. They prophesy lies to the people. The words that come from their mouths did not originate with God like a true prophet's words do.

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

The false prophets of Samaria had deluded the Israelites into idolatries. Yet the Lord considered the false prophets of Jerusalem as guilty of more horrible wickedness, by which the people were made bold in sin. These false teachers would be compelled to suffer the bitterest part of the Lord's indignation. They made themselves believe that there was no harm in sin, and practiced accordingly. Then they made others to believe so.

Those who are resolved to go on in evil ways, will justly be given up to believe strong delusions. But which of them had received any revelation of God, or understood anything of his word? There was a time coming when they would reflect on their folly and unbelief with remorse. The teaching and example of the true prophets led men to repentance, faith, and righteousness. The false prophets led men to rest in forms and notions, and to be quiet in their sins. Let us take heed that we do not follow unrighteousness.

One very good way to tell they were not of God, is because they did not tell the people to repent of their sins and return to God. They kept saying, all is well, when really nothing was well. The purpose of a prophet of God is to bring the message God puts in his mouth. His message should be so powerful that it would cause the people to repent of sin.

Verses 23-24: God at hand ... God afar off": Let not false prophets think they can hide their devices from God, who declares Himself omnipresent and omniscient, in both an immanent and transcendent sense.

God's active presence in all of His creation is what theologians call God's "immanence". Both God's transcendence and His immanence are always true at the same time (Psalm 139:7). The two are always in perfect balance – He is always near and He is always far (above our understanding). Paul reminds us that God "is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:22-28).

Jeremiah 23:23 "[Am] I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?"

Although God is often revealed in the Old Testament as "at hand" (i.e., near or immanent in earth's activities, especially in relation to Israel's worship (Isa. 65:5). Or in the experiences of those who are His own (Psalms 85:10; 145:18; Isa. 50:8). The remark here stresses that God's nearness to His people is not to be taken as a mere confession with no reality in their lives (compare 7:4; 12:2). Moreover, we are to be reminded that God is also "afar off" (i.e., distant or transcendent, Psalm 139:2). One who sovereignly directs the affairs of earth's history in accordance with His wise and holy purposes (compare Isa. 40:21-23; 44:24 to 45:6; Psalm 103:19-22; Dan. 2:20-21; 4:34-37). God longs to draw near to His people, but His presence is not to be taken for granted. Nor can He be manipulated for selfish gain (compare 8:8-9; 18:18).

God is omnipresent. He is everywhere all the time. He knows everything about everything you have ever done. God is not like these false gods that they could hold in their hands. His presence is everywhere.

Jeremiah 23:24 "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the LORD. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the LORD."

What do these atheistic priests, and prophets, and people think? Do they think that I, who am a God of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, see and take notice of what doctrine they preach, and what lives they live? If they did, surely they would not dare to do as they do.

Do they think that I do not see or take notice of them? Can any hide themselves out of my sight?

I fill heaven and earth, not only with my influence, but with my essence, with the immensity of my being. Which, as it cannot be circumscribed by any, so it is shut out of no place.

God answers His own question here. There is no place to hide from God. He knows all of your deeds and He even knows your thoughts and the desires of your heart.

1 Kings 8:27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" He may be all over the earth, but He is seated in heavenly places as well. Be sure He knows all about you, good and bad.

Jeremiah 23:25 "I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed."

"I have dreamed": Here was a claim to divine revelation through dreams (compare Num. 12:6). But such claims were a deception (verses 26-27), utterly unequal in power to God's Word (verses 28-29).

In the Old Testament, God usually spoke to His servants directly (compare 1:4-10; Isa. 8:1), or in a vision (1:11, 13; Isa. 1:1; 6:1; Ezek. 1:1; Dan. Chapter 7). God did at times use dreams to reveal His will to His own (Gen. 28:11-17), especially to equip His servants who would labor in foreign cultures where dreams and their interpretations were regarded as particularly important (e.g., Joseph, Gen. 37:5-11; 40:5-22; 41:1-36; and Daniel in Dan. 2:1-45; 4:4-27).

God is aware of every statement we have ever made. It is especially bad for those who pretend God has sent them when He has not.

Matthew 12:36 "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

Jeremiah 23:26 "How long shall [this] be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, [they are] prophets of the deceit of their own heart;"

The words point to the form of the claim commonly made by the false prophets. Dreams took their place among the recognized channels of divine revelation (Gen. 40:8; 41:16; Joel 2:28; Dan. 7:1). But their frequent misuse by the false prophets brought them into discredit, and the teaching of (Deut. 13:1-5), accordingly brought the “dreamer of dreams” no less than the prophet to the test whether what he taught was in accordance with the law of Jehovah. The iteration of “I have dreamed” represents the affected solemnity with which the false prophets proclaimed their visions. Of the misrepresentation of dreams, consequent on this abuse, we have a striking example in (Eccl. 5:3), and later still in (Eccl. 34:1-7).

To prophesy or preach without being called of God, is a disastrous thing. First of all, the message is not from God, but from within oneself. The message is not of benefit to the hearers, but to the one speaking. The mouth speaks from the issue of the heart. If the heart is wicked and deceitful, the mouth speaks deceit. Many today have taken on the ministry as a vocation. This is very dangerous. To minister, one must be called of God.

Jeremiah 23:27 "Which think to cause my people to forget my name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor, as their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal."

That is, to forget me, and those things by which I have made myself known unto them, my word and my works.

"By their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbor": As if they were revelations which I had in their sleep made known unto them. But they are indeed lies, and nothing but the deceits of their own hearts.

"As their fathers have forgotten my name for Baal": So that in effect they are Baal's priests. For as Baal's prophets, by publishing their pretended revelations from Baal, seduced the people from the service and obedience of the true God. So these, by telling their pretended dreams, seduced men from their obedience to God in what he revealed to them by the true prophets. They agreed in the end, the seducing of the people from God, though they differed in the meaning. The one pretending relations from Baal, the other from the true God by their dreams.

These false prophets are promoting worship of false gods. In this particular instance, the false god was Baal. The people had taken their minds off of God and on to these prophets. These false prophets were leading them astray.

Jeremiah 23:28 "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream; and he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What [is] the chaff to the wheat? saith the LORD."

Not a Divine dream; a revelation which I have made to him in his sleep (as appeared by the following opposition, between a dream and the word of the Lord). But if any man hath dreamed an ordinary dream, let him tell it as a dream; let him not attach God's name to it.

"And he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully": And let him to whom I have revealed my will publish and declare that in all truth and faithfulness. Not adding his own fancies or dreams to it (2 Cor. 2:17; 1 Peter 2:2), not corrupting my word.

"What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord": There is as much difference between my will and their dreams as there is between the chaff and the wheat. The one is of value to make food for the soul, as wheat doth for the body. The other is of no value: the one (in other words, my word), is of a solid, abiding substance. The other is light and airy, and easily scattered by every wind.

The statement above, is not to discourage the true prophet who really does hear from God. If you do have a dream from God, go ahead and tell it. If God places the Words in your mouth, speak them. Just make sure the dreams and the Words are from God. The chaff and the wheat are in the world together. The wheat is speaking of those who are really of God. The chaff is sown by Satan. They both grow together till the harvest. Christians are in the world with those who are not saved. We just keep our life straightened out in the midst of the world. Do not look at circumstances around you. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Jeremiah 23:29 "[Is] not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer [that] breaketh the rock in pieces?"

"As a fire ... hammer": God's Word has irresistible qualities to prevail over the deception in the shepherds' false messages.

The Words of God as a fire, burn the evil out. Those who come to God have a broken and a contrite heart. God applies the heat and the hammer to produce a stone fit for the builders. Jesus is the cornerstone, and we are the lively stones held together by the cornerstone.

Jeremiah 23:30 "Therefore, behold, I [am] against the prophets, saith the LORD, that steal my words every one from his neighbor."

Another note of the counterfeit prophet is found in the want of any living personal originality. The prophecies of the dreamers were patchworks of plagiarism, and they borrowed, not as men might do legitimately, and as Jeremiah himself did, from the words of the great teachers of the past. But from men of their own time, false and unreal as themselves. What we should call the "in-crowd" of false prophets went on repeating each other's phrases with a wearisome repetition. In "my words" we have, probably, the fact that, in part also, they decked out their teaching with the borrowed plumes of phrases from true prophets.

God is not against all prophets, just the ones who prophesy falsely. It is as if the false prophet is listened to more attentively than the true prophet. The people are beginning to disregard the message of the true prophet, thus the words are stolen from him. God is against the prophet who is prophesying for his own self.

Jeremiah 23:31 "Behold, I [am] against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith."

Not another sort of prophets distinct from the former, or those that follow. But the same under another character, and against whom he was, and set his face on another occasion.

"That use their tongues": At their pleasure, their lips being their own. So the Targum, "who prophesy according to the will of their own hearts." Talk in a haughty and insolent manner, speaking bold and daring things of the divine Being. Or in a boasting bragging manner, extolling themselves, and speaking highly in their own commendations. Or rather in a flattering way to the people. So some read it, by a transposition of a radical letter, "that smooth their tongues", as Kimchi. Or speak smooth things with their tongues, to please the people.

"And say, he saith": That is, "the Lord", as the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions express it. That so they might be the more easily believed by the people. But this was highly provoking to God, to father their lies and falsehoods upon him.

Not everyone who says "Thus saith the Lord" is really speaking for God. They are using God to get what they want. This is a very evil thing to do. This is a lying tongue.

Jeremiah 23:32 "Behold, I [am] against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD."

And not true ones, such as the Lord spoke in to his prophets, and which they communicated from him to his people (see Num. 12:6).

"And do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies, and by their lightness": By the false doctrines and prophecies which they delivered, and by their loose and disorderly lives which they led. So that they debauched the principles of the people by the former, and their practices by the latter. Kimchi interprets the word translated "lightness" of lightness of their knowledge; as if it was through the shallowness of their judgments. And want of capacity in teaching that the people were made to err by their false doctrines. The Targum interprets it of their impudence or rashness; and Schultens, from the use of the word in the Arabic language, explains it of their pride and false glorying.

"Yet I sent them not, nor commanded them": Wherefore they lied, and acted an excessively boastful part, when they pretended they were sent by him. And had their orders from him what they should say (see Jer. 23:21).

"Therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord". So far from it, that they did them a great deal of hurt by their lies and flatteries. Seducing them from the ways and worship of God. And leading them on in such as would issue in their destruction, and did.

A false prophet has no intention of helping anyone but himself. We are cautioned to try the spirits, and see whether they be of God or not. It appears these false prophets are so convincing with their made up dreams that many believe them. It will profit no one at all. To believe a lie is a destruction, not a help.

Jeremiah 23:33 "And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What [is] the burden of the LORD? Thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD."

"The burden of the Lord ... what burden?" The people asked, in mockery, for Jeremiah to give them his latest prophecy ("oracle"). This ridicule of Jeremiah's faithful preaching demanded a response, and God told the prophet to repeat the question and reply simply "I will abandon you", meaning judgment from God was coming.

The Hebrew word translated "burden" can also mean "oracle". Coming from a root meaning to "lift up", it signifies that which God places upon the prophet's heart to bear. Its message may either be one of judgment (Isa. 13:1; 15:1; Ezek. 12:10) or of promise (Zech. 12:1-10). There is a word and thought play here. Apparently, Jerusalem's false prophets made a charade of this word, chiding Jeremiah as to the burden of the day. In the Lord's reply, the Hebrew text reads literally, "What burden?" The ancient Greek and Latin versions render this phrase, "You are the burden!" In either case, the Lord goes on to tell the false prophets plainly that they are to stop claiming that they speak the burden of the Lord. They will find their own words to be a burden too heavy to bear, and God will in turn cast them off as a burden that He will no longer carry.

Verses 34-40: The burden of the Lord": When a person falsely claimed to have a word from God, he would be punished for perverting God's truth. Claiming to have prophecies from God, when not true, is dangerous.

Jeremiah 23:34 "And [as for] the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house."

Be they one or the other, or all of them. No regard will be had to their character and office, rank and dignity.

"That shall say, the burden of the Lord": Using that phrase in a bantering and ludicrous manner.

"I will even punish that man and his house": Not only he, but his family shall suffer for it. This shows how much it is resented by the Lord, and what a dangerous thing it is to lampoon the word of God. To make a jest of Scripture phrases, or to joke with them. This is foolish jesting, which is not convenient, yea, impious and abominable.

It appears these false prophets had been preaching good times. They had convinced the people of peace and prosperity. They tried to say that Jeremiah's prophecy was not of God, because of the requirements attached to it. They are teaching that God does not burden the people with regulations. They are free to do as they will. God will greatly punish the false prophet and the people who accept this teaching.

Jeremiah 23:35 "Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbor, and every one to his brother, What hath the LORD answered? and, What hath the LORD spoken?"

When conferring about religious things, and the word of God in particular. When any inquiry is made of another, whether any message from the Lord by his prophets? Or what is it? That it should not be put in such deriding and false words, "what is the burden of the Lord?" but in more decent and becoming language, thus.

"What hath the Lord answered? And what hath the Lord spoken? That they might lawfully and laudably inquire of the prophet what answer he had received from the Lord. And what it was that he had said to him, provided they were serious in it, and asked with meekness and fear. The word of God should be reverently spoken of, and attended to.

We see that doubt has arisen and they are all asking each other, instead of finding their own truth from God. It is as if they are saying, "Who do we believe?"

Jeremiah 23:36 "And the burden of the LORD shall ye mention no more: for every man's word shall be his burden; for ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the LORD of hosts our God."

Or the word of the Lord under that name, speaking of it in a ludicrous and scoffing manner.

"For every man's word shall be his burden": Every flout, scoff, and jeer of his, at the word of God, shall fall heavily upon him, with weight upon his conscience, and press him with guilt to the lowest hell. Or, however, a heavy punishment for his sin shall light upon him. Or, as the words may be rendered, "for his word is a burden to everyone"; that is, the word of the Lord is reckoned by everyone a burden. And with them a burden and the word of the Lord are synonymous terms. Which ought not to be, and was offensive to the Lord. And therefore, he forbids the use of such a phrase, and threatens to punish for it.

"For ye have perverted the words of the living God, of the Lord of hosts, our God": Derided them, and put a wrong sense upon them. And which is aggravated by their being the words of "the living God", who is the true God and his words true. And he lives and is able to resent and punish any ill usage of him, and ill treatment of his words. And not the oracles of lifeless idols. And they are the words of "the Lord of hosts", of all armies above and below, and so was able to make them good. Besides, they were the words of "our God", the God of Israel. Who had in all ages kept his covenant with them, performed his promises to them, and had done great and good things for them.

It appears they had forgotten the commandments of God. They had begun to think of them as a burden. They were listening to the desires of their own selves instead. They are not doing what the Word of God taught them to do. They are doing what was right in their own sight. The answers to all of the world's problems are in the Bible (God's Holy Word). Decisions made with any other rules will not work. To follow your own desires leads to destruction.

Jeremiah 23:37 "Thus shalt thou say to the prophet, What hath the LORD answered thee? and, What hath the LORD spoken?"

To Jeremiah, or any true prophet of the Lord. After the following manner should everyone address him that made any inquiry of the will of the Lord.

Those are miserable indeed who are forsaken and forgotten of God. And men's jesting at God's judgments will not baffle them. God had taken Israel to be a people near to him, but they shall now be cast out of his presence. It is a mark of great and daring impiety for men to jest with the words of God. Every idle and profane word will add to the sinner's burden in the Day of Judgment, when everlasting shame will be his portion.

"What hath the Lord answered thee? and what hath the Lord spoken?" This is repeated from (Jer. 23:35); for the confirmation of it, and for the direction of the people. And to show how much the Lord approved of such a way of behaving towards his prophet, and himself by him.

We see these people were listening to the advice of the false prophet. They were asking the false prophet what the will of God was for their lives. They were being led away from God.

Jeremiah 23:38 "But since ye say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD;"

Seeing, notwithstanding all prohibitions of it, and directions to the contrary, they still persisted to call prophecy by this name. And that in a humorous and jesting way, and asked for it, and what it was, in a scoffing manner.

"Therefore thus saith the Lord, because you say this word, the burden of the Lord": Will continue to use it, though so displeasing to me.

"And I have sent unto you, saying, ye shall not say, the burden of the Lord": And therefore, could not plead ignorance of his will, or excuse themselves, by saying they would have avoided it, had they known it was disagreeable to him. This was an aggravation of their lack of reverence that they should obstinately persist in it, after he had made a forcefully reproachful protest against it by his messages to them.

The false prophet had been answering them as if it were directly from God. They were saying their answers were from God, when in fact they were their own words. God warns these false prophets not to use His name when proclaiming these falsehoods.

Jeremiah 23:39 "Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, [and cast you] out of my presence:"

That is, so behave towards them, as though they were entirely out of his sight and mind. Show no affection to them and take no care of them. Bestow no favors upon them and no more have them under his protection. In the word here used, and rendered "forget", and the word before used for a "burden", there is an elegant play on words, which another language will not easily express. No doubt there is an allusion to that word in this.

"And I will forsake you": Neither grant them his gracious presence, nor his powerful protecting presence, but give them up to the enemy.

"And the city that I gave you and your fathers": The city of Jerusalem, which he had given to them to dwell in, and their fathers before them. But now they having sinned against him, and provoked him. Therefore, notwithstanding this grant of the place to them, and which is mentioned that they might not depend upon it. And buoy up themselves with hopes that they should be in safety on that account. As he had forsaken them, he would forsake that, and the temple in it, and give it up into the hand of the Chaldeans.

"And cast you out of my presence": As useless and loathsome. The Targum is, "I will remove you far away, and the city which I save you and your fathers from my word." it signifies their going into captivity.

God is speaking to all of the people, as well as to the false prophets here. The city spoken of is Jerusalem. God had given the Promised Land to the children of Israel. Now He is saying, His protection and blessing on them will be no more.

Jeremiah 23:40 "And I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten."

Which was a just retaliation for reproaching, vilifying, and bantering his word. They who had been honored so much and so long as the people of God, and their city counted the glory of the earth. Yet now both they and that should be the byword of the people. And had in the utmost contempt, and that for ever, or at least a long time, even for a series of ages. Which has been their case ever since their destruction by the Romans, and still is. For this cannot be restrained to the short captivity of seventy years in Babylon. Though this reproach began then, and they never recovered their former honor and glory.

"And a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten": The same thing in different words, to heighten their disgrace, and confirm the perpetuity of it.

They have rejected God and His Truth. Now God has rejected them. The everlasting reproach is certainly true even today. In many lands today it is difficult to be a Jew. It is even thought of as being a shame. A good example of this was the trouble the Jews had under Adolph Hitler in World War 2. God will always leave a crack in the door for them to enter into. Through faith in Jesus Christ, they can be saved.

Jeremiah Chapter 23 Continued Questions

1. The anger of the LORD will not return, until when?
2. When does the great judgement come on all mankind?
3. Where will the sheep spend all of eternity?

4. These false prophets are not _____ prophets.
5. Where do the words of a true prophet originate?
6. What would they have done, if they had been true prophets?
7. God is _____. He is everywhere all the time.
8. Can anyone hide from God?
9. What way did they say they received their prophecy?
10. They are prophets of the deceit of their own _____.
11. The mouth speaks from the issue of the _____.
12. To minister, one must be _____ of God.
13. What false god is mentioned in verse 27?
14. Verse 28 explains what about prophets?
15. Who is the wheat speaking of?
16. Who is the chaff speaking of?
17. Christians should not look at the _____ around them.
18. What is God's Word compared to in verse 29?
19. Those who come to God must have a _____ and a _____ heart.
20. Jesus is the Cornerstone, and we are the _____ stones.
21. What prophets is God against?
22. What were the false tongues saying?
23. What profit do the people get from a false prophet?
24. What message had these false prophets been teaching?
25. When doubt arose, where were they seeking an answer from?
26. Every man's _____ shall be his burden.
27. They have _____ the Word of the living God.
28. The false prophets had been answering them as if it were the _____
_____.

29. God warns the false prophets not to use His _____.
30. What do verses 39 and 40 say will happen to them?