

# Jeremiah

## Chapter 23

### *The Righteous Branch*

**“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!” declares the LORD. 2 Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: “You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. 3 Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4 I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD. 5 “Behold, the days are coming, declares 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. 6 In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’ 7 “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ 8 but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.”**

**23:1–8†** A summary statement (probably dating to Zedekiah’s reign; see note on v. 6) that includes God’s intention to judge the wicked rulers and leaders of Judah (vv. 1–2), to ultimately bring his people back from exile (vv. 3–4, 7–8), and to raise up the Messianic Davidic King (vv. 5–6). (CSB)

**23:1-6** The prophet Jeremiah lived at the end of the period of the monarchy, through the destruction of Jerusalem, and into the beginning of the exile. The failure of Judah’s kings and priests to be faithful to the teaching of God or to receive the message that God sent through Jeremiah and other prophets is a significant theme in the Book of Jeremiah and provides the background for our Old Testament Reading. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

The Text as Literature: The pericope consists of two oracles that together highlight the contrast between how things are in the world and how they will be in the messianic age. In the first of these oracles, vv 1–4, God condemns the failure of the present shepherds and promises to gather his scattered flock and replace the failed shepherds with shepherds who will care for his flock properly. The point of the oracle is highlighted by the contrast between the actions of the shepherds, who will “scatter” and “drive away” the flock, and God, who will “gather” and “bring back” the flock. The judgment of God is cast in terms of a pun using the Hebrew word *paqad*. The term is translated “attend to”

Just as God promised to replace failed shepherds with true shepherds in the first oracle, in the briefer second oracle, vv 5–6, God declares that he will replace the failed king with a proper descendant of David who will save God’s people and rule over them justly and righteously. The phrase “righteous Branch” (v 5) refers to a legitimate descendant and heir to the throne. In this case, the Hebrew term *tsadiq* does not have the moral overtones that modern readers normally associate with the term “righteous,” and instead means something more like “right” or “proper” or, in the context of discussing the heir to a dynastic throne, “legitimate.” As in the first oracle, the point is reinforced by means of a play on words or, in this case, a play on the names. The king of Judah at this time was named Zedekiah, a descendant of David who was placed on the throne by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar as a puppet after the Babylonians captured Jerusalem and took the former king (Jehoiachin) into exile around 597 BC. Zedekiah (also called

Mattaniah) ruled for about eleven years, until the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of 587. The name Zedekiah means “Yahweh is my righteousness.” This is essentially the same meaning as the name that Jeremiah says will be given to the proper Davidic king to come, “Yahweh is our righteousness.” However, the elements of the name are reversed: zedeki–ya[weh] versus yahweh–zedeqenu. The reversal of the name captures the point of God’s message, that in the age to come the proper king of Israel will reverse the situation brought on by the failure of kings of the present. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 3)

**23:1–2** Arraignment of the wicked shepherds extends into the opening verses of ch 23. God will punish them as they deserve for neglect of their duties. (TLSB)

**23:1** *woe* – hohee - Oh!!! Meant to get the reader’s/hearer’s attention. (QV)

*shepherds* - rawaw - A pastor or someone who cares for people or sheep. (QV)

The term “shepherd” is rich in biblical imagery. Being a shepherd was an independent, responsible, and dangerous job. It was also a descriptive word for kings, and the verb form is often translated “to rule.” The Lord Himself is a shepherd (Gen 48:15; 49:24; Ps 23:1; 80:1) and does the jobs of a shepherd: going before, guiding, leading, protecting, feeding, and carrying. Israel’s leaders are also called shepherds – but are condemned for their failure to take care of their charge. In this portion of Jeremiah and in 31:10 (also Is. 40:11; Eze 34) the Lord promises personally to gather His flock. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

*who destroy* – awbad - To allow the sheep to wander away from safety so that they will perish. (QV)

*scatter* – oots - To break into many pieces and scatter to the four winds. They literally had driven them away from God which is not what a good shepherd does. Instead he goes ahead of them. (QV)

Israel and Judah, specifically the congregation of the Lord in the midst of the people, are called the flock of Jehovah's pasturage because He attends them with His particular care. All the more reason, therefore, to denounce the leaders who were so willfully forgetful of their duties. (Kretzmann)

John 10:2-5 “The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”

*sheep*. The people of Judah (see v. 2). (CSB)

*my pasture* – meereeth - A place where the sheep could eat in peace and get the nourishment they needed. (QV)

*Lord* – Yehovaw - This is the personal and covenant name of God, emphasizing his role as Israel’s Redeemer and covenant Lord. (QV)

**23:2** *you have scattered.* The same Hebrew root underlies both phrases. What Judah's rulers had failed to do is summarized in Eze 34:4. (CSB)

The leaders of the Israelites, including the false prophets (23:9-40) and the unfaithful priests (23:11), are to blame for scattering of the flock instead of gathering them around God's Word and sacrifices at the temple. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

**23:3** *remnant.* God will not let their wickedness frustrate His announced purpose to let Abraham's descendants be instrumental in blessing "all the families of the earth." To pursue His plan of salvation (Gn 17:19), He will first bring back a remnant from the Babylonian captivity. (TLSB)

*I have driven.* Although Judah's sins and the sins of their leaders had caused them to be "driven ... away" (v. 2) into exile, the Lord himself ultimately carried out the results of his people's repeated violations of their covenant commitments. (CSB)

Into exile. The shepherds and not God were responsible for this because of their ungodly leadership.

Although the people themselves had permitted themselves to be corrupted by their false leaders, yet the burden of the guilt lay on the rulers, this phase of the matter being emphasized in this instance. (Kretzmann)

*be faithful and multiply.* Man goes forth under this divine benediction—flourishing, filling the earth with his kind, and exercising dominion over the other earthly creatures (see v. 26; 2:15; Ps 8:6–8). Human culture, accordingly, is not anti-God (though fallen man often has turned his efforts into proud rebellion against God). As God's representative in the creaturely realm, he is steward of God's creatures. He is not to exploit, waste or despoil them, but to care for them and use them in the service of God and man. (CSB)

**23:4** *will set shepherds* - Men like Ezra and Nehemiah.

Cf Ezk 34 for an expanded prophecy of the Good Shepherd; cf Jn 10:1–18 for its fulfillment. Cf Ps 80:1; 95:7. (TLSB)

*fear...dismayed.* The absence of a concerned shepherd invites attacks by wild animals (see Eze 34:8). (CSB)

Sheep that were left unattended were fair game for any wild animal or other predator. Being properly cared for would relieve that anxiety.

*be missing.* See Nu 31:49. The Hebrew root underlying this phrase is the same as that for "bestowed care" and "bestow punishment" in v. 2 (see note there). (CSB)

pa<sup>w</sup>ka<sup>d</sup> - To keep safe. To care for and be responsible for or there will be punishment at the time of accounting.

They will not be missed, that is, they would no more be lost from the flock, since the Lord's shepherds would take the best care of them. The Messianic import of this passage is unmistakable, but this factor is brought out even more strongly in the next paragraph. (Kretzmann)

**23:5–6** One of the most important Messianic passages in Jeremiah, echoed in 33:15–16. (CSB)

**23:5** *days are coming*. The language and concepts of the prophecy range back and forth between preliminary and final fulfillment, between shadow and the substance of what is to come (Col 2:17). (TLSB)

*raise up*. See 2Sa 7:12; see also 30:9; Eze 34:23–24; 37:24. The Hebrew for this phrase is translated “place” in v. 4. (CSB)

*for David*. The Messiah, unlike any previous descendant of David, would be the ideal King. He would sum up in himself all the finest qualities of the best rulers, and infinitely more. (CSB)

*Branch*. A Messianic title. The Targum (ancient Aramaic paraphrase) reads “Messiah” here. (CSB)

The Lord will shape history so that “the days are coming” when He will establish His messianic kingdom on earth. From the root of David’s lineage, He will let spring forth a branch, or descendant. Unlike Israel’s kings, He is righteous in His person (cf Zec 3:8; 6:12; Is 9:7). As indicated by His name, His subjects will also derive a unique benefit from His reign. For claiming His merits before the judgment seat of God, they, the unrighteous, will be declared righteous (Rm 3:21–26). (TLSB)

*reign...wisely*. This would be the ideal king who looks out for all the needs of each subject and keeps them safe from all harm.

*Execute justice and righteousness*. See 22:3, 15; said also of King David (see 2Sa 8:15). (CSB)

Hebrew tsadaq, “proved right” or “good order.” Used to describe a person in a right relationship with God trusting God’s promised salvation and living by the covenant promise. The Psalms describe how the wicked plot against the righteous, but the Lord watches over the righteous and delivers them. God is righteous because He faithfully and justly keeps His Word. (PBC)

**23:6** *Judah ... and Israel*.† God’s reunited people will be restored, a pledge of the Messianic kingdom’s spiritual unity (see Eze 37:15–22). (CSB)

Israel and Judah, reunited to become one nation, are a pledge of the spiritual unity of the messianic kingdom. Saved from extinction in Babylon, the people of Israel foreshadow the perfect bliss awaiting the new Israel, the Church. The rule of good shepherds reaches its fullness when Jesus Christ will effect justice and righteousness (v 5). (TLSB)

After the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. (described in Jeremiah 39), Judah would never regain her political independence. Even after the return from exile, she would be dominated by other nations. Yet as T. Laetsch points out, the true Israel or “remnant” would enjoy the “spiritual peace and liberty flowing from the Righteous Branch. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

A remnant of God’s people will be restored.

Ezekiel 37:15-22 “The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, ‘Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, ‘Ephraim’s stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand. “When your countrymen ask you, ‘Won’t you tell us what you mean by this?’ say to them, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim’s hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with

him, and join it to Judah's stick, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.' Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.'

*The LORD Our Righteousness.* † Although Zedekiah did not live up to the meaning of his name, "The LORD is my righteousness," Jesus the Messiah would make it possible for his subjects to be accounted righteous in God's sight and thus be saved and live in safety (see Eze 34:25–31). (CSB)

Through Him, we become righteous in God's sight. "Christ alone is our Righteousness, who is true God and man, because in Him the divine and human natures are personally united with each other" (FC Ep III 1). (TLSB)

He is called them because he justifies us by his sinless life, death on the cross and resurrection from the dead.

This means "The Lord is my Righteousness." If so, it shows how the Lord would work through the messianic King to bring the righteousness that both the unfaithful rulers and their subjects lacked. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 4)

Here the Messiah is spoken of by a name, in a figure, which is used also by Isaiah and Zechariah. To David, namely, as a descendant of Judah, as a member of his family, Jehovah will cause to arise a righteous Branch, a shoot characterized by, and distinguished for, righteousness. This Branch will at the same time be a King, who would have royal power and would make use of that power and authority in taking care of the affairs of His kingdom in a prudent manner. The excellency of His rule would be brought out particularly by the fact that He would perform judgment and execute righteousness according to unquestioned standards, although unusual in the eyes of men. For He would show these traits in bringing salvation to Judah and in letting Israel dwell in safety, both expressions referring to the true spiritual Israel, the Church of Christ. No wonder, then, that His name would be called "Jehovah Our Righteousness," since, by virtue of His perfect atonement, all men may become partakers of the righteousness earned by Him for them (Kretzmann)

**23:7–8** Repeated almost verbatim from 16:14–15 (see notes there). (CSB)

Jehovah Our Righteousness" is the one Hope of all mankind; for by faith in His redemption men become partakers of the righteousness earned by Him, which makes them just in the sight of God. (Kretzmann)

*north country.* The direction of return from Babylon. (TLSB)

**23:1–8** God promises to give His people a new and righteous King who will save and protect them as long as He reigns over them. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is this King, and He draws all believers together in one flock of faith, laying down His life for them and taking it up again (Jn 10). • Dear Jesus, keep us in Your flock, safe from all harm and danger. Amen. (TLSB)

*Concerning the prophets:*

**My heart is broken within me; all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the LORD and because of his holy words. 10 For the land is full of adulterers;**

because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil, and their might is not right. 11 “Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their evil, declares the LORD. 12 Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall, for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, declares the LORD. 13 In the prophets of Samaria I saw an unsavory thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. 14 But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his evil; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.” 15 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets: “Behold, I will feed them with bitter food and give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has gone out into all the land.” 16 Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. 17 They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’” 18 For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? 19 Behold, the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. 20 The anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his heart. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. 21 “I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. 22 But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds. 23 “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? 24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. 25 I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ 26 How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, 27 who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? 28 Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. 29 Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? 30 Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another. 31 Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, ‘declares the LORD.’ 32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all, declares the LORD. 33 “When one of this people, or a prophet or a priest asks you, ‘What is the burden of the LORD?’ you shall say to them, ‘You are the burden, and I will cast you off, declares the LORD.’ 34 And as for the prophet, priest, or one of the people who says, ‘The burden of the LORD,’ I will punish that man and his household. 35 Thus shall you say, every one to his neighbor and every one to his brother, ‘What has the LORD answered?’ or ‘What has the LORD spoken?’ 36 But ‘the burden of the LORD’ you shall mention no more, for the burden is every man’s own word, and you pervert the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God. 37 Thus you shall say to the prophet, ‘What has the LORD answered you?’ or ‘What has the LORD spoken?’ 38 But if you say, ‘The burden of the LORD,’ thus says the LORD, ‘Because you have said these words, “The burden of the LORD,” when I sent to you, saying, “You shall not say, “The burden of the LORD,”” 39 therefore, behold, I will surely lift you up and cast you away from my presence, you and the city that I gave to you and your fathers. 40 And I will bring upon you everlasting reproach and perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.”

**23:9–40** False prophets denounced (see 2:8; 4:9; 5:30–31; 6:13–15; 8:10–12; 14:13–15; 18:18–23; 26:8, 11, 16; 27–28; Isa 28:7–13; Eze 13; Mic 3:5–12). (CSB)

**23:9** Introduces an undated oracle. (TLSB)

*Concerning.* Introduces headings also in 46:2; 48:1; 49:1, 7, 23, 28. (CSB)

*prophets.* God entrusted the spiritual welfare of His people to them. They desecrated their sacred office with false teaching and immoral living (2:8, 26; 5:31; 14:13–16; 27:9–10, 16–18; 32:31–32). (TLSB)

*his holy words.* Contrast the unholy words of the false prophets (see vv. 16–18). (CSB)

Namely, because he feels in advance the terrors of the judgment which would come upon his countrymen on account of the wickedness of the false prophets. (Kretzmann)

**23:10** *adulterers.* A crime being unusually prevalent at that time, as a natural consequence of the shameless rites introduced in connection with the idolatry practiced by the false prophets. (Kretzmann)

*curse.* Brought on by violating the Lord's covenant. (CSB)

*dried up.* To worship other gods is to deny to the land the fertility that only the Lord can bring (see Hos 2:5–8, 21–22; Am 4:4–9). (CSB)

That is, on account of the curse following such a grave transgression the land was fading away like a wilting flower. (Kretzmann)

*land mourns.* The very pastures of the steppes no longer yielding sufficient food for the herds of cattle which usually dotted their slopes. (Kretzmann)

*course is evil.* Evil because it is their own and not God's (see 8:6). (CSB)

Their thought and endeavor in general, their entire behavior, being wicked and guilty. (Kretzmann)

**23:11** *in My house.* Idols were placed even in the temple (2Ki 21:5). (TLSB)

Most likely in their shameless idolatry, which they did not hesitate to practice in the very courts of the Lord's Temple. (Kretzmann)

**23:12** *slippery path.* See Ps 35:5–6; see also Ps 73:18. (CSB)

Their false doctrine and their sinful life proving their downfall. They would be punished and thus brought to fall in their own transgressions. (Kretzmann)

*in the year* – So that His calamity would strike them at the appointed time, at the time of Jehovah's punishment. In order to emphasize the wickedness of the prophets, they are now compared with the prophets of Samaria, the religion of which was a strange mixture of Jehovah cult and heathen abominations. (Kretzmann)

**23:13** *prophesied by Baal*. They were insisting that they were inspired by this idol. (Kretzmann)

**23:14** *seen a horrible thing* – An abomination which filled him with loathing. (Kretzmann)

*walk in lies*. See 14:13. (CSB)

They live an utterly immoral and hypocritical life. (Kretzmann)

*strengthen the hands of*. The Hebrew underlying this phrase is translated “encouraged” in Eze 13:22. (CSB)

*no one turns from his evil*. Instead of reproof and converting them, that none doth return from his wickedness. (Kretzmann)

*like Sodom ... like Gomorrah*. The essence of all putrid wickedness. (Kretzmann)

**23:15** *I will give... poisoned water*. Repeated almost verbatim from 9:15 (see note there). (CSB)

*ungodliness*. So that profligacy was practiced everywhere; the Holy Land was desecrated and the Word of the Lord blasphemed, even as it is today in consequence of similar behavior on the part of men who call themselves ministers of the Word. (Kretzmann)

**23:16** *do not listen* – Cf 5:13. (TLSB)

*visions*. “Revelations” or “prophecies” (see 1Sa 3:1; Pr 29:18; Isa 1:1; Ob 1). (CSB)

Revelations of their own imagination. (Kretzmann)

*from their own minds*. See v. 26; 14:14. False prophets are like preachers of a “different gospel” (Gal 1:6–9). (CSB)

Their so-called messages to the people being made without authorization of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

**23:17** *You will have peace*. The essential message of the false prophets (see 6:14 and note; 8:11; 14:13 and note; cf. 28:8–9). (CSB)

Irresponsible coddling of evildoers. (TLSB)

*stubbornness of their hearts*. See note on 3:17. (CSB)

A willful disobedience to the Lord's will. (Kretzmann)

*no disaster shall come upon you* – Proclaiming a security which the Lord had expressly denied them. (Kretzmann)

**23:18** *council of the LORD*. God's heavenly confidants (see v. 22; Job 15:7–10; Job 1:6; 2:1; 29:4 and note; Ps 89:7). In Am 3:7 the Hebrew for “council” is translated “plan,” the purposes that God has promised to reveal to his chosen servants (see v. 20). (CSB)

They did not associate with the Lord like the prophets to whom He entrusted the task of “revealing His secret” (Am 3:7). (TLSB)

*paid attention to his word and listened* – The prophet again denies that any of these false, self-appointed prophets can be mouthpieces of Jehovah. Jeremiah, on the contrary, now proclaims a word of the Lord which is entirely different in content from the inventions of the false prophets. (Kretzmann)

**23:19–20** Repeated almost verbatim in 30:23–24. (CSB)

**23:19** *storm ... whirling tempest*. A vivid image of God's wrath. (CSB)

Same threat is found in 30:23–24. (TLSB)

**23:20** *anger of the Lord will not turn back* – Not cease from carrying out His judgment. (Kretzmann)

*accomplished* – everything that He had planned with regard to the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. (Kretzmann)

*latter days* – At the time when His judgment would strike the people. (Kretzmann)

*you will understand it clearly*. Unlike the false prophets, who continued to mislead their hearers even in Babylonia after the exile of 597 B.C. (see 29:20–23). (CSB)

They will be fully aware of the truth of His threats. At the same time the Lord denies that He has in any way authorized the deceivers of His people. (Kretzmann)

**23:21** *I did not send*. See v. 32; 29:9; contrast 1:7; Isa 6:8; Eze 3:5. (CSB)

They had not been commissioned as His messengers. (Kretzmann)

*they ran* – As messengers. (TLSB)

*did not speak to them*. Insisting that they possessed the prophetic spirit of the true God. (Kretzmann)

**23:22** *my council*. In other words, they would preach repentance from idolatry instead of confirming the people in their false security, which has ever been a trick of such as falsely proclaimed themselves messengers of the Lord. To give weight to these reproofs, the Lord now shows why it is that He is familiar with the hypocritical conduct of the false prophets. (Kretzmann)

**23:23** *God at hand... God far away*. God is both transcendent and immanent; he lives “in a high and holy place, but also with him who is ... lowly in spirit” (Isa 57:15). (CSB)

**23:24** *hide ... so that I cannot see him*. See Job 26:6; Ps 139:7–12; Am 9:2–4. (CSB)

*I fill heaven and earth*. See Isa 66:1. (CSB)

Luther: “Now, if someone has Him who fills all things, he has more than the whole world. He has the real Fountain, not merely a spoonful, which is what the world would be in comparison with this Fountain. Even if God gives much—a kingdom, Persia, the papacy, an empire—it is still only a small leftover, a bit of bread, a spoonful, a mouthful. It is not the real Fountain but only a piece that He gives everyone and tosses up for scrambles. But when a man has Him who has more than He can give away, as the saying

goes, then his heart knows that he has a gracious God and all things in Him. What could such a heart ever lack?" (AE 13:405–6). (TLSB)

Nothing being hidden from His omniscient gaze, from His omnipresence. With these attributes at His disposal, the Lord is naturally familiar with the acts and thoughts of all men everywhere. (Kretzmann)

**23:25** *lies*. See 5:12. (CSB)

They offered the dross of their own imagination instead of the gold of God's Word. (Kretzmann)

*dreamed.*† God used dreams to reveal himself and to communicate with people (Ge 28:12–13; Nu 12:6; Mt 1:20; 2:12, 19), but the false prophets promulgate “false dreams” (v. 32), fabricated in “the delusions of their own minds” (v. 26). (CSB)

**23:26** *heart ... heart*. The Hebrew is the same for both words. (CSB)

**23:27** *my name*. To forget the Lord's name is tantamount to forgetting him. (CSB)

*forgot my name for Baal*. When Judah's ancestors forgot God, they began to serve Baal (see Jdg 3:7; 1Sa 12:9–10). (CSB)

Prophets who taught contrary to the doctrines revealed by God were to be branded impostors. (TLSB)

The Lord now sets forth the principle which is to guide those who claim for themselves the authority of His messengers. (Kretzmann)

**23:28–29** The true word of God is symbolized in three figures of speech (grain, fire, hammer). (CSB)

**23:28** *speak my name faithfully* – God works through His powerful Word. Corruption of His Word leads to confused teaching, hence the responsibility of godly teachers is great. (TLSB)

*straw ... wheat*. Of the two, only grain can feed and nourish (see note on 15:16). (CSB)

Contrast between the less useful straw and the precious, life-giving Word of God that nourishes faith. (TLSB)

The dreams of the false prophets are chaff, empty straw; God's Word, alone is the grain, the real substance. And still more the Lord asserts in characterizing His Word, the only message that has the right to be proclaimed as the eternal truth. (Kretzmann)

**23:29** *like fire*. The fire of the divine word ultimately tests “the quality of each man's work” (1Co 3:13). (CSB)

Devouring and destroying all the philosophy of men which will not stand the test of His eternal truth. (Kretzmann)

This is God's thunderbolt. By the Law He strikes down both obvious sinners and false saints. He declares no one to be in the right, but drives them all together to terror and despair. This is the hammer.... This is not active contrition or manufactured repentance. It is passive contrition, true sorrow of heart, suffering, and the sensation of death” (SA III III 2). (TLSB)

*like a hammer*. Similarly, the divine word works relentlessly, like a sword or hammer, to judge “the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb 4:12). (CSB)

Its power overcoming even the hardest and the strongest fabric of men's imagination. (Kretzmann)

**23:30–32** *I am against*. The threefold statement is for emphasis. (CSB)

**23:30** *who steal my words* – They appropriated the inspired sayings of the true prophets in order to give their own oracles a show of right. (Kretzmann)

**23:31** *prophets who ... declare*. False prophets are claiming that their own prophecies are the oracles of God. The Hebrew for this verb is used only here with someone other than God as the subject. The phrase “declares the LORD” or its equivalent occurs hundreds of times in the OT, more frequently in Jeremiah (over 175 times) than in any other book. (CSB)

Literally, “that take their own tongues and utter a divine oracle,” asserting that they were proclaiming messages from the true God, when they were setting forth nothing but their own inventions. (Kretzmann)

**23:32** *did not send*. A most emphatic statement that their activity would result in nothing but injury to the people. (Kretzmann)

**23:33** *burden*. The Hebrew for this word can also mean “burden” (see NIV text note), a term that may refer to a burdensome message from the Lord (see, e.g., Na 1:1). (CSB)

Hbr ordinarily denotes a weight or load carried by man or beast of burden (17:21; 2Ki 5:17). Also has the transferred meaning of message or utterance. (TLSB)

**23:35** *Lord answered* – Thus showing the proper respect for the prophecy of Jehovah. (Kretzmann)

**23:36** The three divine titles at the end of the verse enhance the solemnity of what is being said. (CSB)

*burden...every man's word* – That is, this expression, if used in such a jeering sense, would become a burden to such a scorner, heavy enough to bear him down to the ground. (Kretzmann)

*living God*. See 10:10; Dt 5:26. (CSB)

Whose majesty is here emphatically declared, to give added weight to His proclamation. (Kretzmann)

**23:37** **WHAT HAS THE LORD SPOKEN** – That alone was the proper way of speaking to Jehovah's messenger. (Kretzmann)

**23:38** **YOU USED THE WORDS** – Persisting in their meanness in spite of the Lord's express command. (Kretzmann)

**23:40** Echoed from 20:11. (CSB)

A similar fate awaits those who in our days purposely follow the lead of the false prophets and join them in jeering and mocking those who confess the truth. (Kretzmann)

**23:9–40** God condemns the spiritual leaders of Judah for misleading His people. They should have warned sinners of the impending judgment, but they did not, allowing the people to slide into idolatry and immorality. (Pray for pastors and other spiritual leaders, that they may fulfill their important callings.) The Law is to be preached to unrepentant sinners, no matter how painful it may be, so that people are not deceived. The Gospel is to be preached to spirits crushed by the Law, bringing light and life through faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior. • Lord, when we stray, may Your Law show us our sin. Always keep before us the Gospel, the wonderful cross of Christ crucified for sinners. Amen. (TLSB)