

“The Remnant of My Sheep”: A Study of Jeremiah 23:1–8 in its Biblical and Theological Contexts

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Jeremiah’s early ministry (622–605) B.C.E. occurred during the time of Josiah’s reform (Jer 1:2; 2 Kgs 22–23; 2 Chron 34–35) when “he shared the broader hope that Judah will now seize the opportunity . . . to renew commitment to the ancient Yahwistic faith.”¹ But with the untimely death of Josiah,² the nation plunged into anarchy, and Jeremiah witnessed and testified during its ultimate demise (chaps. 37–44). Nevertheless, he maintained a salvific hope for the remnant. However, for Jeremiah the true remnant did not consist of the people who remained in Judah after the exile; rather the exiles themselves comprised the remnant for whom the promises of divine restoration were reserved.³ Jer 23:1–8 presents three oracles which discuss the future remnant community.

Translation and Textual Considerations

(1) “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture,”⁴ says the Lord. (2) Therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel against the shepherds who are shepherding my people, “You yourselves have scattered my flock and have driven them away and

¹ Jack R. Lundbom, “Jeremiah (Prophet),” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 3:687. There is some debate concerning Jeremiah’s prophetic career. While the majority favor the claim of Jer 1:2, a handful of claimants say that he came to prophetic office after the death of Josiah. For an overview, see Robert Altmann, “Josiah,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (1992), 3:1017.

² Richard D. Nelson, “Josiah in the Book of Joshua,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 540, claims that Josiah’s piety was “the decisive criterion” by which the kings of Judah were judged. As such, he surpassed even David.

³ See my “The Remnant Motif in the Context of Judgment and Salvation in the Book of Jeremiah,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1995), 376–77; idem, “The Remnant and the New Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah,” *AUSS* 34 (1996), 248.

⁴ MT reads *mar‘itī*, “my pasture.” LXX reads *nomēs autōn*, “their pasture.”

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you have not taken care of them. Behold, I will take care of you for the evil of your deeds,” says the Lord. (3) “Furthermore, I myself will gather together the remnant [š^oērîṭ] of my sheep from all the places where I have driven them there; and I will cause them to return to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. (4) Furthermore, I will appoint shepherds over them who will shepherd them. And they will not be afraid anymore, nor be dismayed; neither shall any be missing,” says the Lord.

(5) “Behold, days are coming,” says the Lord, “When I will raise up for David a Righteous Branch.⁵ And He shall rule as King and deal wisely; and He shall do justice and righteousness in the land. (6) In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely. And this is his name by which he will be called:⁶ The Lord is our righteousness.”⁷

(7)⁸ “Therefore, behold, days are coming,” says the Lord, “When they will no longer say, ‘As the Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel⁹ out of the land of Egypt;’ (8) instead ‘As the Lord lives who brought up and who brought back the seed of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the lands where I had driven them.’¹⁰ Then they shall dwell¹¹ in their own land.”

Structure

There is much discussion regarding the extent of this passage. Some exegetes believe that only vs. 1–4 comprise a complete unit.¹² C. H. Cornill claims that it envelopes vs. 1–6.¹³ Others contend that the pericope extends from v. 1 to v. 8.¹⁴ Several factors recommend this position:

⁵ MT *šemah šaddîq*, “a righteous branch” or “legitimate growth,” points to a true or genuine shoot from a tree. See Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 446. LXX reads *anatolēn dikaian*, “righteous rising,” where *anatolēn* has both the idea of “growing” and “rising” (a figure used of heavenly bodies or the rising of the sun).

⁶ MT *yiqr^o*, “he will call him,” is quite unusual. A few MSS read *yiqr^oû*, “they will call.” Syr., Tg. and Vg. all have *yigrāuhû*, “they will call him.”

⁷ LXX transliterates the name as *Iōsedek*, preceded by *kurios*. Hence, “The Lord will call his name *Iōsedek* (i.e. “Yahweh is righteous”).

⁸ In LXX vs. 7–8 are located after 23:40.

⁹ Instead of “children of Israel,” LXX reads *ton oikon Israēl*, “the house of Israel.”

¹⁰ MT reads *hiddahim*, “I have driven them”; but LXX *exōsen autous* and the parallel passage in Jer 16:15, *hiddihim*, both read “he had driven them.”

¹¹ LXX reads *kai apekatestēsen autous*, “and he has restored them.” In a parallel passage in 16:15, MT reads *wahšibtim*, “I will bring them back.”

¹² John Bright, *Jeremiah*, Anchor Bible, vol. 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 145–46; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 613; Carroll, 443; Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1–25*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 26 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1991), 324. Hereafter cited as CKD.

¹³ C. H. Cornill, *Das Buch Jeremia*. (Leipzig: B. Tauchnitz, 1905), 262.

¹⁴ J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 485–86; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 3d ed., Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 12 (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1968), 125; Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A*

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1. V. 9 introduces a new section with the sub-heading *lann^obiʾim*, “Concerning the prophets.”

2. The entire unit is linked by the divine formula *n^oum ʾadōnāy*, “says the Lord” (vs. 1, 2, 4, 5, 7).

3. Echoes, such as *lākēn*, “therefore” (vs. 2 and 7) and the hiphil form of the verb *ndh*, “to drive,” in vs. 2, 3 and 8 also demarcate the unit.

4. The woe oracle of the introduction and the salvation oracle of the conclusion illustrate a contrast that forms an inclusio of sorts. This is highlighted, in that the introduction deals with “scattering” while the conclusion denotes “re-gathering.”

5. Finally, the motif of restoration is like a thread that binds the entire section together.

It may be best to consider Jer 23:1–8 as the conclusion to the complex of sayings extending from 21:11 to 23:8, where the message of judgment in chaps. 21–22 turns to a message of hope. This conclusion consists of three brief oracles¹⁵ dealing with the future of the remnant:

1. Vs. 1–4, as introduced by the Woe Oracle, *hōy*;
2. Vs. 5–6, as introduced by the phrase *hinnēh yāmīn bāʾim n^oum ʾadōnāy*, “behold, days are coming, says the Lord.”
3. Vs. 7–8 as introduced by the phrase *lākēn hinnēh yāmīn bāʾim n^oum ʾadōnāy*, “therefore, behold, days are coming, says the Lord.”

The first oracle is chiasmatically arranged:¹⁶

- A** Woe to shepherds destroying the flock (v. 1).
- B** You yourselves scattered, thrust out, have not taken care of my flock (v. 2a).
- C** Behold I will take care of you (v. 2b).
- B** I myself will gather, bring back my flock (v. 3).
- A** I will raise up shepherds who will shepherd (v. 4).

The second oracle is similarly arranged:¹⁷

- A** God will raise up a legitimate/righteous ruler (v. 5a–c)
- B** This king will reign prudently/have success (v. 5d)
- C** He will bring justice and righteousness (vs 5e–f)
- B** Judah/Israel will be delivered and be secure (v. 6a–b)
- A** God will name him “Yahweh our Righteousness” (v. 6c–d).

The final oracle may be divided into three parts:¹⁸

Commentary, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 517–19; F. Nötscher, *Das Buch Jeremias* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1934), 174.

¹⁵ Bright, 145; R. E. Clements, *Jeremiah*, Interpretation (Atlanta: Knox, 1988), 137–38.

¹⁶ CKD, 325.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 329.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 332.

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1. An old oath: Yahweh brought up Israel from Egypt (v. 7);
2. A new oath: Yahweh brought back the seed of Israel from exile (v.8a);
3. Again they dwell in their own land (v. 8b).

Historical Background

Some commentators insist that the motif of the ingathering of “the remnant of my flock” (*ʿet-šerîṭ šōʾnî*) points to Ezek 34 and deuteronomic authors.¹⁹ Therefore, it presupposes the exile. However, as Holladay has expressed, the deliberate play on the nuances of *pqd* in vs. 2 (used twice) and 4, and the precise repetition *hārōʿîm hārōʿîm*, “shepherds who shepherd,” suggest the mind of Jeremiah.²⁰ It is then proposed that the tone of hope in this passage suggests a period shortly after Jeremiah’s purchase of the field at Anathoth, “in the summer of 588,”²¹ late in Zedekiah’s reign.²²

Interpretation

This passage, written in prose,²³ begins with a woe oracle.²⁴ Introduced by *hōy*, the woe oracle functions as a threat, pronouncing not only the “forecast of the catastrophe but consciously endorsing and promoting it.”²⁵ The oracle intro-

¹⁹ Carroll, 445; E. W. Nicholson, *Jeremiah 1–25*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 191; W. Theil, *Die Deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremiah 1–25*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 41 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973), 246–48; Seigfried Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im Alten Testament: Ursprung und Gestaltwandel*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 5 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer 1965), 207–08, 212; J. Lust, “‘Gathering and Return’ in Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” in *Le Livre de Jérôme: Le prophète et son milieu les oracles et leur transmission*, ed., P. M. Bogaert (Leuven: Leuven UP, 1981), 134–35, n. 70. Sigmund Mowinckel, *Zur Komposition des Buches Jeremiah* (Kristiania, Norway: J. Dybwad, 1914), 50, accepts the literary integrity of the passage but adds that it is an exilic interpolation based on Ezek 34.

²⁰ Holladay, 614.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bright, 145–46. Cf. Thompson, 487.

²³ Most commentators have urged that this is a prose passage. See Bright, 145; Feinberg, 517; CKD, 324; Rudolph, 124. Others see vs. 2, 4 as poetry while v. 3 is secondary. So Norbert Mendeki, “Die Sammlung und die Hineinführung in das Land in Jer. 23,3,” *Kairos* 25 (1983): 99–103. Thompson (485–86) regards the first two sections as mostly poetic segments, with vs. 7–8 comprised of prose. W. L. Holladay, “The Recovery of Poetic Passages of Jeremiah,” *JBL* 85 (1966): 420–424, once considered the entire passage poetic. He has since changed his position to “a carefully crafted sequence of structured prose (*Kunstprosa*).” See his *Jeremiah 1*, 613.

²⁴ The woe oracle begins with the cry *hōy*, “woe,” followed by a participial clause which describes the offense and announces the judgment. It has three parts: (1) Opening, “Woe to the shepherds” (v. 1a); (2) Accusation, “You destroy and scatter my sheep” (v. 1b); (3) Judgment Speech or Prediction of Disaster (v. 2).

²⁵ Erhard Gerstenberger, “The Woe Oracles of the Prophets,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 251. Richard J. Clifford, “The Use of *Hōy* in the Prophets,” *CBQ* 28 (1966): 463–64, has shown that the woe oracle has an increased bitterness in Jeremiah and Habbakuk. As to the role of *hōy* in the prophets, he adjudges that it is an automatic reaction of the prophets upon hearing the word of God’s judgment. “To

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duces a pattern of speech described by W. Janzen as the “reversal pattern,” which in its most pointed form is as follows: You have done X; therefore, X will be done to you.²⁶ This points to the idea of *lex talionis*. Therefore, the woe oracle provides a climactic, emotional content to the judgment at hand.

This woe oracle indicts the shepherds²⁷ for destroying and scattering Yahweh’s sheep.²⁸ W. L. Holladay comments, “The implication here is that neglect leaves the sheep as dead as if they have been deliberately killed; ‘scatter’ has a similar implication.”²⁹ The duty of the shepherds was to protect the sheep and keep them safe from the attacks of wild animals that would destroy and scatter the flock. Hence, the shepherds are like wild animals, destroying and scattering that which they were supposed to protect.

Further, a bit of irony is exposed here. Since both verbs (“destroy” and “scatter”) are usually used with Yahweh as subject (cf. 15:7; 18:17), “he may have occasion to punish his people, but it is illegitimate for the kings and officials of the people to do so.”³⁰

The accusation of the “woe” oracle is followed by the elements of a typical judgment speech in v. 2:

- (i) the transition word *lāken*, “therefore”;
- (ii) the messenger formula *kōh ’amar* ^ʾ*dōnāy*, “thus says the Lord”;³¹
- (iii) the people accused (*the shepherds shepherding my flock*);³²
- (iv) the accusation (“*you yourselves have scattered my flock*”); and

the prophet, God’s word is as good as the deed it announced. Promise of destruction was the destruction.”

²⁶ W. Janzen, *Mourning Cry and Woe Oracle*, BZAW 125 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 82. This woe oracle also provides a link with 22:13, where it is employed in a similar manner: “*Woe to the one who builds his house in unrighteousness.*”

²⁷ “Shepherd” is a time-hallowed title for kings in the ancient Near East. See Ralph W. Klein, “Jeremiah 23:1–8,” *Int* 34 (1980), 168. The reference in Jer 22:22 to the shepherds, speaks of Judah’s leaders, especially her kings. Since chap. 22 dealt with Judah’s kings, some named and others unnamed, it seems safe to infer that the shepherd imagery in chap. 23 has the same meaning. While no kings are specified here, they are lumped together. As Klein, *ibid.*, 167–68, says, “Their misdeeds are summarized as those of malpracticing shepherds.”

Elsewhere, the sheep-shepherd imagery is to be found in Pss 74:1; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3; Isa 40:10–11; Ezek 34. Since Ezek 34 contains the expression “my sheep” eleven times, this has prompted Norbert Mendecki, “Einfluss des Buches Ezechiel auf Jer 23,3; 29,14; 32,37,” *Collectanea Theologica* 55 (1985): 147–51, to claim that Jer 23 depends on the language of Ezekiel.

²⁸ Both *m^ʿabb^ʿdīm*, “destroying,” and *m^ʿpiṭīm*, “scattering,” are participles, suggesting a continued practice.

²⁹ Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 614.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ CKD, 325, shows that both the transition word and the messenger formula are stylistic features that link the oracles of 22:18 and 23:2.

³² Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 614, claims that this “precise duplication *hārōʿīm hārōʿīm*, is witty for it is clear that the assumed syntax is an agent noun followed by a participle with verbal force . . . analogous to ‘prophets who prophesy’ (*hannebiʿīm hannibb^ʿīm*) in v. 25.”

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(v) a divine speech issued in the first person (“Behold, I am about to take care of you”).³³

The emphatic pronoun, *’attem*, (“you yourselves”) stands at the head of the judgment oracle. This oracle, issued in direct speech, picks up the terminology of the first accusation and extends it: *You yourselves have scattered my sheep and caused this dispersion/scattering.*” The judgment is then voiced by the play on the key word *pqd* since it is this same verb that expresses both the shepherds’ sins and Yahweh’s punishment of them. The shepherds have failed to “take care of” (*pqd*) the flock in a positive sense; therefore, God will “take care of” (*pqd*) the shepherds, in a negative sense. This is a case of reversal. Yahweh will visit upon the shepherds the evil of their actions; He will turn their own deeds back upon them. This pun goes beyond irony. It becomes “clear that the shepherds are only the *cause*, but Yahweh Himself is the *agent* of judgment on the kings.”³⁴ The judgment oracle then ends abruptly with the repetition of the messenger formula, “thus says the Lord.”

Verse 3 now expresses a reversal from judgment to salvation.³⁵ Further, the emphatic “*I myself*” is contrasted to that of v. 2, “you yourselves.” This emphasis introduces another shift in the passage. Whereas in v. 2 the shepherds were accused of the dispersion, in v. 3 Yahweh claims responsibility for the dispersion.³⁶ But there is no contradiction. Yahweh had exiled the people on account of their sins and those of the leaders. This truth may be expressed either as Yahweh as the active agent of the exile, or by saying that the people’s sins caused their exile.

However, v. 3 presents a striking contrast with v. 2 in terms of the actions and results of the shepherds and Yahweh. The shepherds’ actions resulted in the flock being cast out, but Yahweh’s actions result in the ingathering of the remnant.³⁷

This may be expressed in terms of contrastive parallelism.³⁸

³³ See CKD, 325; Klaus Koch, *The Growth of the Biblical Tradition: The Form Critical Method*, trans. S. M. Cupitt (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1969), 210–20; Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 404–05.

³⁴ Klein, 168.

³⁵ The conjunction *waw* connects both verses. It appears that this conjunction is not completely adversative (“but”) or temporal (“then”). As CKD, 326, points out, it seems to have “both a temporal quality, marking a shift between what the shepherds had been doing and what Yahweh *could do* (past, present and future), and a contrast between the shepherds and Yahweh. ‘Furthermore’ seems to be the best word to capture both elements.”

³⁶ This is seen by some scholars as being contradictory, and hence they see the phrase “from all the lands where I have driven them” as an insertion which disrupts the flow of images in vs. 1–2, 4. However, such a claim for divine prerogative is widespread in the book of Jeremiah: 8:3; 16:15; 23:8; 24:9; 27:10, 15; 32:37.

³⁷ Bright, 139, translates *š’erîṭ šō’nî* with “what is left of my flock.” Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 615, accounts for the use of the term “remnant” as another suggestion of the kings’ neglect.

³⁸ CKD, 326–27.

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A You (shepherds) scattered my flock
B and you thrust them out
C and did not take care of them
C I (Yahweh) will take care of you
A I will gather the remnant of my flock
B I will cause them to return.

Yahweh's ingathering and return of the remnant is in direct contrast to the shepherd's actions of scattering and thrusting out the flock. In fact, the verb "gather" is a precise resolution of "scatter" in vs. 1–2a.³⁹ This act of salvation on behalf of the remnant speaks of

Yahweh's sovereign role. It is further highlighted in that the remnant will be returned to their own pasture. In Jer 6:2 the "fold" metaphor functions in an oracle of judgment where foreign shepherds will dominate Judah. But in Jer 23:3 the sheep will be returned to their rightful pasturage.⁴⁰

The restoration of the remnant is further emphasized by the last two verbs in v. 3: *ûpârû w'râbû*, "and they shall be fruitful and they shall multiply." These reflect on Genesis and creation terminology.⁴¹ These are the same words pronounced both on the sea creatures and birds (Gen 1:22) and to humankind (Gen 1:28). They were reaffirmed to the remnant who survived the flood (Gen 9:1). Therefore, this ingathering signals a new beginning, as did creation and as did the post-flood time. Further, the book of Exodus opens with the same motif: *the Hebrews were fruitful and multiplied*, so that the land was full of them (Exod 1:7). Similarly, the restoration of the remnant is a new exodus, a new return. Indeed, "Exodus and creation terminology intermingle, and this new exodus/return will use both types of language."⁴²

Also, this phrase reminds one of covenantal promises and blessings. Jeremiah had earlier mentioned such a promise in 3:16. It functions here to remind "the people that God will not forget his covenant with them. Political and national changes will take place. The continuance of Yahweh's covenant, however, is assured."⁴³

The salvation of Yahweh on behalf of the remnant is furthered in v. 4: Yahweh will replace the bad shepherds with good shepherds, who will really

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1–25: To Pluck Up, To Tear Down*, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 99.

⁴⁰ The pasture (*nāwah*) may be used in reference to a place of security, refreshment, and contentment. This "fold" metaphor has both a positive (31:32; 33:12; 50:19) and negative (10:25; 25:30; 49:19, 20; 50:7, 44, 45) value in the book of Jeremiah.

⁴¹ Cf. Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1982), 110–14. See also, my "'Creation' in the Book of Jeremiah," in *Creation, Life, and Hope: Essays in Honor of Jacques B. Doukhan*, ed. Jiri Moskala (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2000), 40.

⁴² CKD, 327.

⁴³ Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 703.

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shepherd.⁴⁴ It is now noted how Yahweh's actions completely reverse the situation of judgment to that of salvation: the verbs "scatter," "drive away," and "not taken care of" (v. 2) are now replaced with "gather," "bring back," and "shepherd."⁴⁵ The effect will be that there will be no more fear or dismay. The combination "not fearing" and "not being dismayed" is a "typical promise of deliverance based on Yahweh's presence."⁴⁶

The last phrase now returns to the play on the verb *pqd*. In the expression *w'lo' yippaqēdū*, the niphal form here may be understood as "none will be lacking/missing." As such, the idea is denoted that none of the flock will be missing. Yahweh's work is perfect. When He gathers the remnant and returns them to safety, with new leaders, there would be no need for apprehension. Yahweh will not miss a single one of His remnant flock.

In this pericope, judgment and salvation stand side by side. Just as Yahweh had executed punitive action against his people, He could return the exiled, here described as the remnant. Otherwise, the people's fate would have been permanent loss.⁴⁷ Holladay concludes, "The fact that the passage is both a judgement oracle and a salvation oracle indicates that it stands at the beginning of a new age."⁴⁸

The restoration of the remnant and the installation of the new age requires that proper leadership also be restored to the community. Jer 23:5–6 now introduces the leader, *par excellence*, a royal figure whom Yahweh will "raise up" (*qūm*). This verb provides the link between both sections, since it is used in vs. 4 and 5. Hence, the new David is the concrete manifestation of God's promise to "set up" or raise shepherd kings over the restored remnant community.⁴⁹

Whereas vs.1–4 placed emphasis on the deliverance of the remnant, vs. 5–6 focus on this figure who will lead the restored remnant community.⁵⁰ This is borne out by the structure: Yahweh is the subject of A/A' while the royal figure is the subject of B/B' and C. He is characterized as a righteous ruler. As the structure indicates, there is a strong interest in *šdq*, "righteous(ness)." The root

⁴⁴ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 615, comments with great insight that the shift from the participle in v. 2 to the waw-consecutive perfect *w'rā'ūm* ("and they will shepherd them") signals a movement: they will really shepherd.

⁴⁵ Cf. Klein, 169. See also Geo Widengren, "Yahweh's Gathering of the Dispersed," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer, JSOT Supplement Series 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 227–34. He believes that Mesopotamia was the point of origin of this motif of the gathering of the dispersed but that the formality of this theme is most remarkable when dealing with the Israelite-Judean people especially as witnessed in the phenomenon of such verbs used in apposition.

⁴⁶ CKD, 327.

⁴⁷ Carroll, 445.

⁴⁸ Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 615.

⁴⁹ Klein, 170.

⁵⁰ CKD, 329, points to the similarity with the figure in Isa 11:1–9.

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sdq forms an inclusio in vs. 5c and 6d. It is also at the center of the chiasm dealing with this king's rule of righteousness (v. 5f.).

This ruler will come from the Davidic tree (i.e., dynasty), which is cut off but not dead.⁵¹ Jeremiah 21:11–22:30 showers judgment upon the representatives of the Davidic dynasty during Jeremiah's time because they failed to demonstrate the true qualities of kingship.⁵² Further, J. Swetnam has demonstrated that with the appointment of Zedekiah as a Babylonian puppet king replacing Jehoiachin, who was exiled, tension broke out in Judah regarding legitimacy.⁵³ Against this background Jeremiah delivered his message of the *semah saddiq*, the "Righteous Shoot" or "True Shoot" or "Legitimate/Righteous/True/Scion."⁵⁴ In short, the only legitimate leader of the reconstituted community is the *semah saddiq*. Kingship and therefore leadership had failed. The leaders were in no position to save the scattered people. With the harsh denunciations in Jer 22:24–23:2, Jeremiah meant to stifle any hope that leadership at that point was the solution. A new form of leadership was needed.⁵⁵ Joyce G. Baldwin has made a case that this refers to a figure who incorporates the offices of both priest and king.⁵⁶ Such a figure is identified as the Messianic King.⁵⁷ This is the direction of the Targum, which has "an Anointed One/Messiah of Righteousness." The shoot is that which springs from the fallen tree and thus bears in itself and

⁵¹ Thompson, 489.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ J. Swetnam, "Some Observations on the Background of *saddiq* in Jeremiah 23:5a," *Bib* 46 (1965): 29–40. He holds that the oracle legitimizes a pro-Babylonian ruler instead of the captured Jehoiachin. E. Lipinski, "Études sur deux textes 'messianiques' de l'Ancien Testament," *Semetica* 20 (1970): 41–59, believes that this passage was delivered in 597 B.C.E. as an official proclamation of the new name of the new king, Zedekiah.

⁵⁴ This expression is seen as a *terminus technicus* for the Messiah in the book of Jeremiah. See M. Rehm, *Der Königliche Messias im Licht der Immanuel-Weissagung des Buches Jesaja*, Eichstätter-Studien, 1 (Kevelaer: Butzon und Bercher, 1968), 254–256. Cf. Bright, 144. This is the best rendering of the same expression in a third-century B.C.E. Phoenician inscription from the northern coast of Syria and from Ugaritic texts. See Swetnam, 29–33; J. C. L. Gibson, *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions*, vol. 3: *Phoenician Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 134–41. See also G. A. Cooke, *A Textbook of North Semitic Inscriptions: Moabite, Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Nabataean, Palmyrene, Jewish* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), 86; A. M. Honeyman, "A Phoenician Inscription of Ptolemaic Date," *JEA* 26 (1940): 64; Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 161. However, H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12: A Commentary*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 166, says that in Jeremiah the term has not yet become a Messianic title, but simply refers to "those who come after."

⁵⁵ W. J. Wessels, "The Fallability of Leadership According to Jeremiah 23:1–4," *Old Testament Essays* 6 (1993): 334.

⁵⁶ Joyce G. Baldwin, "*Semah* as a Technical Term in the Prophets," *VT* 14 (1964): 93–97.

⁵⁷ Cf. Isa. 11:1; Jer 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12. J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 338; J. Becker, *Messianic Expectations in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Van Groningen, 704; Bright, 143; H. Freedman, *Jeremiah*, Soncino Books (London & Bournemouth: Soncino Press, 1949), 153.

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sustains new life. This is precisely the task of the Messianic figure whose rule is described as establishing an able rule characterized by prudence (*škl*): MT *ûmālak melek w^ehiškîl*, literally, "And a king will rule and act wisely." The point is made that this ideal king will exercise real sovereignty over the remnant community, unlike Zedekiah, who was merely a puppet king.⁵⁸ This is so because he will "deal or act wisely" with prudence (*hiškîl*). He will be an able leader⁵⁹ who will have insight and act circumspectly. This results in success.⁶⁰ Jer 10:21 describes the judgement invoked upon the shepherd-leaders, who were regarded as foolish, since they did not seek the Lord. Hence, they lost their flocks. Now the leadership and success of the ideal king are brought into bold relief, for as leader *par excellence*, all of his fold will be accounted for; none will be missing (Jer 23:4).

The reason for such success is that central to his rule he will execute justice (*mi pat*) and righteousness (*š^edaqah*). This is a summation of the function of the ideal king. William McKane comments that the king's responsibilities point to the demands made on Davidic kings and criticism of their performance found in 21.12 (22.3) and 22.13–19. It recalls passages in the books of Samuel where the king's supreme responsibility in these matters is assumed and his incorruptibility expected (2 Sam 12.1–17), where neglect of them is represented as a grave dereliction of duty and a reason for withdrawing loyalty (2 Sam 15.1–6), and where his profound legal acumen is portrayed (2 Sam 14.1–24; cf. 1 Kgs 3.16–28).⁶¹

Viewed against the prevailing social milieu of Jeremiah's time, the just and righteous rule of this figure is highlighted. The king was commissioned to "do justice and righteousness" (*ʿašû mišpat ûš^edaqah*). Instead, Jehoiakim was guilty of covetousness, oppression, violence, murder and foolish building projects in time of siege. Because of this, he deserved the burial of an ass (Jer 22:13–19). Zedekiah was weak, vacillating, and indecisive, and disobedient to the divine will (Jer 37:3; 16–21; 38:1–5) and he broke the covenant with the manumission of the slaves (chap. 34). Hence, he failed to rule with justice and righteousness. In direct contrast to such evil, the coming king will reign with justice and righteousness, effecting what Mowinckel calls a "moral revival."⁶² In short, this king will bring the covenant conditions to the people: righteousness and justice.⁶³

⁵⁸ Thompson, 490.

⁵⁹ Bright, *Jeremiah*, 140. "As king he shall reign—and ably."

⁶⁰ Louis Goldberg, "saka," *TWOT* (1980), 2:877; M. Saebo, "škl hi. einsichtigein," *THAT* (1984), 2:824–28.

⁶¹ William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah, I*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 562.

⁶² Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 179.

⁶³ CKD, 331. Cf. Thompson, 491, who rightly ties the realization of blessing in the land with kingship exercised in the context of faithfulness to covenant stipulations

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The result of such rule is found in v. 6ab: Judah “*will be delivered and Israel*⁶⁴ *will dwell securely (in safety).*” This is an expression of confidence where the restored remnant community will live under Yahweh’s protection.⁶⁵ Mowinckel comments correctly that this salvation (*ys’*) “includes not only deliverance, preservation, and victory in war, but also every kind of well being, good fortune, and ideal conditions.”⁶⁶

This rejuvenation is directed toward Judah *and* Israel. While it has been put forward that “Judah” and “Israel” are being used synonymously,⁶⁷ it may also be suggested that such usage points in an eschatological direction; that is, it points to faith in the future,⁶⁸ “the new and the entirely other (occurring) after a break with what has gone before,”⁶⁹ the inauguration of a new era.⁷⁰ When the prophet speaks of the salvation of the remnant community, the idea of the glorious days of the united kingdom under the united monarchy comes to the foreground. This is especially highlighted in view of the successful rulership of the *semah saddiq*, the Messiah. Mowinckel says convincingly, “The Messiah is the future, eschatological realization of the ideal of Kingship.”⁷¹ He is raised up by God, not by an accident of history. He is the One through whom the redemptive, salvific activity of God, on behalf of the (eschatological) remnant, will be effected.⁷²

Further, this is the intent of the expression *hinneh yamim ba’im*, “behold, days are coming.” This is an eschatological formula, as attested by Walter C. Kaiser.⁷³ This points to a distant rather than an immediate future and is indicative of a decisive break in the history of the Davidic monarchy and the Judean

⁶⁴ LXX reads “Jerusalem” instead of “Israel.” Cf. Jer 33:16.

⁶⁵ Alfred Jepsen, “*aman*,” *TDOT* (1974) 1:292–322. This expression is found repeatedly in the OT: Lev 25:18, 19; 26: 5; Deut 12:10; 33:12, 28; Isa 32:17; Jer 33:16; 32:37; Ezek 28:26; 34:25, 27, 28; 38:8, 14; 39:26; Zech 14:11.

⁶⁶ Mowinckel, *He that Cometh*, 177. This is an approximation of *shālôm*, which points to “safety and security, good order and morality in the nation, fellowship (‘wholeness’) and brotherhood, in short whatever may be described as material well-being and sound social and moral conditions.”

⁶⁷ CKD, 330.

⁶⁸ Robert P. Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition?” *ZAW* 94 (1982):48.

⁶⁹ Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 11.

⁷⁰ Thomas M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 215–17. See also W. J. Wessels, “Jeremiah 33:15–16 as a Reinterpretation of Jeremiah 23:5–6,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47 (1991): 327.

⁷¹ Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, 156. Cf. H. L. Ellison, *The Centrality of the Messianic Idea for the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale, 1953), 12, who claims, “The Messiah is an eschatological figure.”

⁷² Contra to E. Jenni, “Eschatology in the Old Testament,” *IDB* (1962), 2:130, who sees the Messianic hope as being invalid in the book of Jeremiah. Jutta Hausmann, *Israel’s Rest: Studien zum Selbstverständnis der nachesilischen Gemeinde*, Beitr_ge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, 7 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1987), 208, says that the remnant thought is encountered in combination with Messianism, but is not fundamentally connected to or an integral part of it.

⁷³ Walter C. Kaiser, “The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34,” *JETS* 15 (1972): 19. See also von Rad, “‘Day’ in the OT,” *TDNT* (1964), 2:946.

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state. It is not merely the introduction of a prediction of the replacement of one Judean ruler "with another within the framework of a continuing historical institution of monarchy. It involves rather, as does vs. 1–4, an acceptance of the inevitability of political collapse and disintegration."⁷⁴

Finally, the name of the king is given: *YHWH šidqēnû*, "Yahweh is our Righteousness." This is a biting play on king Zedekiah for this name is practically Zedekiah written backwards, *šidqî-yāhû*. This means "Yahweh is righteousness/ my righteousness" but the king himself was far from such. Like his predecessors Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, Zedekiah had "little interest in the establishment of God's righteous kingdom. . . . [He had] perpetuated the policy of *Realpolitik* and opposed Jeremiah's prophetic message."⁷⁵ But this new king *par excellence* is already characterized as righteous. Hence, the intent is a reversal of all the aspects of Zedekiah's (and previous rulers') reign and fate: whereas Zedekiah sought a miraculous intervention, but only the pronouncement of judgment was given (21:1–10: chap. 34), and the scattering of the people, this new king will succeed in the deliverance and regathering of the remnant: whereas Zedekiah failed to live up to his name, this king will not fail.

The final oracle (vs. 7–8)⁷⁶ of this pericope continues the message of hope already present in the previous two oracles. The expression *lākēn hinnēh-yāmîn ba'im*, "therefore, days are coming,"⁷⁷ effectively links this with the previous oracle, with the divine formula, *n^eum ^adônāy*, "says the Lord," connecting all three units.

Structurally, it is based on the replacement of an old oath with a new one. What is recounted is the Exodus from Egypt, which is used in the first oath formula, "As Yahweh lives who brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt." The new oath⁷⁸ now invokes a new Exodus that surpasses in grandeur the original Exodus from Egypt. The new Exodus has a wider scope than the first, regathering the people from the north and from all the lands where they were driven. This scope suggests an eschatological proportion. Klein points in this direction when he says that Yahweh's faithfulness is expressed in this new act of

⁷⁴ McKane, 560. Cf. Rudolph, 202; and M. Sekine, "Davidsbund und Sinaibund bei Jeremia," *VT* 9 (1959): 55, who maintains that the phrase *harē hayyāmîm hāhēm* is a technical term which points to the eschaton.

⁷⁵ VanGemeren, 312.

⁷⁶ These verses occur with minor variations in Jer 16:14–15.

⁷⁷ M. Weinfeld, "Jeremiah and the Spiritual Metamorphosis of Israel," *ZAW* 88 (1976): 18, has demonstrated that this and similar expressions are particularly Jeremianic, occurring numerous times within the book of Jeremiah and only four times outside: 1 Sam 2:31; 2 Kgs 20:17 = Isa 39:6; Amos 8:11; 9:13. He shows also that the introductory formulae are associated mainly with the return of the captivity, the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the shoot of David, as well as with vengeance executed on the enemies of Israel.

⁷⁸ P. R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 238, calls this a new *confessio fidei* that summarizes "the account of what Yahweh had done in the great decisive moment of the Exodus."

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salvation, the antitype of the old: "He is not merely a deliverer in the past tense. Rather, he will deliver in the future from the north country and from all the countries where he had driven the people. His new action surpasses the old."⁷⁹

The idea here is that as in the first Exodus there was a single unified nation, so now with the restoration of the remnant in terms of a new Exodus there is the reunification of the people and the name Israel returns. Stephen D. Hicks, in commenting on the motif of restoration and renewal, points to an eschatological fulfillment when he adds that "nothing past or present conforms to this vision. Its realization belongs to a 'redeemed people' . . . in the messianic age."⁸⁰

This new Exodus of the regathered or the remnant community is tacitly connected to the New Covenant of Jer 31:31–34. Inasmuch as the Exodus from Egypt was ratified by the establishment of the covenant at Sinai, so now the new Exodus is to be ratified by a New Covenant. In both cases God took the initiative, but just as the new Exodus replaces the old one as the decisive saving event,⁸¹ so too must the New Covenant replace the former. Gerhard F. Hasel focused on this in his description of the eschatological remnant community as "a remnant comprising those with a 'new heart' who live on the basis of the 'new covenant' (Jer. 31:31–34)."⁸²

The "new heart" also provides a connection between the remnant and the New Covenant in that it embodies the ideal of interiority.⁸³ It is this "internalization that assures the success of the new community."⁸⁴ Holladay has noted the nexus between this restored remnant community and the New Covenant, "If Israel is to swear by a God of the new exodus, then that new exodus will have to overshadow the old, just as the new covenant (31:31–34) will overshadow the old."⁸⁵

The fundamental quality of the first Exodus and covenant was to establish the people. So too, the new Exodus and the New Covenant are to reestablish the people, that is, the remnant community. Both share the reality embodied in

⁷⁹ Klein, 171.

⁸⁰ Stephen D. Hicks, "The Prophetic Literality of Tribal Reconstruction," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, ed. Avraham Gileady (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 280. Cf. Roland K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 853.

⁸¹ McKane, 566.

⁸² Gerhard F. Hasel, "Remnant," *ISBE* (1988), 4:133; idem, "The Origin and Early History of the Remnant Motif in Ancient Israel," (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1970), 395–99, has much to say about the eschatological remnant in the book of Isaiah.

⁸³ H. D. Potter, "The New Covenant in Jeremiah XXXI 31–34," *VT* 33 (1983): 350; E. Jenni, "Eschatology in the OT," *IDB* (1962):130; J. Swetnam, "Why Was Jeremiah's New Covenant New?" in *Studies on Prophecy: A Collection of Twelve Papers*, VT Supplement, vol. 26, ed. G. W. Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 111–13.

⁸⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, "The Old Promise and the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31–34," *JETS* 15 (1972): 12.

⁸⁵ Holladay, *Jeremiah I*, 623.

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Yahweh’s *Bundesformel* (Covenant Formula):⁸⁶ *I will be your God and you will be my people* (Jer 31:33; Deut 29:12, 13).⁸⁷

Jeremiah had criticized the people and the leadership for breaking and abandoning the covenant.⁸⁸ In its place they had adhered to institutions such as the temple which had degenerated to mere human structure maintained and protected by mere human effort and ingenuity.⁸⁹ But Jeremiah now vigorously declares that Yahweh will inaugurate a new era with the renewed remnant community ruled under the auspices of the New Covenant with a new king.⁹⁰

Conclusion

God takes the initiative in the restoration of His people. Despite the actions of the leaders or shepherds in leading the people astray. God determined to perform an act of salvation: the regathering of the remnant. It is not that they possessed some special quality that recommended them to God and resulted in their rejuvenation. The divine initiative is not to be overlooked.

Contrary to the actions of the leaders, God will set up a new leader *par excellence*—the Righteous Branch/Shoot, identified as the Messiah. In contradistinction to the leaders, his rule will be characterized by wisdom, justice, and righteousness. In fact, a central interest of Jer 23:1–8 is righteousness (*sdq*). Even the name of the new king is “The Lord our Righteousness.” In the face of controversy regarding legitimate leadership, Jeremiah shouts that no confidence is to be placed in the leadership, only in the *ṣemaḥ ṣaddiq*. As His name denotes, only He can effect salvation.

God’s regathering of the remnant is described in terms of a “New Exodus.” The scope and magnitude of this event places it in the direction of eschatology.

⁸⁶ R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel*, Theologische Studien 68 (Zurich: EVZ, 1963), 6.

⁸⁷ Gerhard F. Hasel, *Covenant in Blood* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1982), 101–02; Steven M. Fettke, *Messages to a Nation in Crisis: An Introduction to the Prophecy of Jeremiah* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), 49; E. W. Nicholson, *Preaching to the Exiles: A Study of the Prose Tradition in the Book of Jeremiah*, (Oxford & New York: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 82–83; B.W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), 394.

Kaiser, 12, insists that this “promise is actually God’s single all encompassing declaration” and that this formula epitomizes the content of promise. In his assessment of this promise, Van Gemeren, 314, says, “The hope of the new community remains the same covenantal promise.” He adds, 502, n. 90, that this reflects the eschatological era.

⁸⁸ For a thoroughgoing study of how Jeremiah was a critic of society and how he used social criticism to illustrate the people’s failure of realizing the covenantal ideal, see Laurent Wisse, *Jérémie, critique de la vie sociale: justice sociale et connaissance de Dieu dans le livre de jérémie*, (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982).

⁸⁹ VanGemeren, 312; William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 83–86.

⁹⁰ See G. Pattison, “The Moment of the Void: A Meditation on the Book of Jeremiah,” *ExpT* 97 (1985–86): 132–36. He claims for Jeremiah an ultimate horizon, a place for meeting and listening to God, who in turn is attentive to human needs and well being.

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Further, the regathering of the remnant in terms of the new Exodus provides a tacit connection with the new covenant concept, in that, inasmuch as the first Exodus was ratified by the covenant at Sinai, so now must this new Exodus be ratified by the new covenant. The focal point voiced by the prophet is that God will inaugurate a new era with the renewed covenant community under the articles of a new covenant with a new king.

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