

Jeremiah 23:5-6 - A Righteous Branch

By: Steven Lloyd

The prophet Jeremiah foretold the coming doom of Judah and Jerusalem, and lived to see the words of his prophecy fulfilled. Judah's problems began early. When seen from a bird's eye view, one strand of the Story the Bible tells can be summarized in this fashion. God begins by ruling and reigning over His creation as King. The Psalmist affirms that "The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever" (Ps. 29:10). Psalm 10:16 affirms, "the Lord is king forever and ever."

Later in the Story, the elders of Israel approach Samuel, the prophet, to give them a king so they might be like the nations around them (1 Sam. 8:20). Their request is wrought with problems. For example, the elders of Israel were unimpressed with the corrupt leadership that waited in the wings. Samuel's sons "took bribes and perverted justice" (1 Sam. 8:3). Second, Israel, as a nation, was not to be like the nations around them. On the contrary, they were supposed to function as light to the nations. They were to be a kingdom of priests to the gentiles (see Dt. 4:1-8). Third, they were rejecting God as their King.

Samuel was vexed by the nation's request, but the Lord said, "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being *king* over them" (1 Sam. 8:7, italicized for emphasis). What they received, in return, were kings: first Saul, then David, then Solomon. At the death of Solomon the nation divided, and the northern tribes, known as Israel, had their kings, and the southern tribes, known as Judah, had their kings. There were no righteous kings in Israel. There were only a handful of good kings in Judah.

The books of 1 & 2 Kings begin on a high note with Solomon on the throne. The fame of his wealth and wisdom reach the ears of the Queen of Sheba. Examples of his great wisdom are given—but, the books end with Zedekiah being led in chains to Babylon, but not before he sees his sons murdered and his eyes are plucked from his head.

How do we get from the splendor of Solomon's kingdom to Babylonian Captivity? The answer is, the kings. It was due to the corrupt leadership of the kings that Israel was ultimately led to captivity. God, the ideal King, ruled over all of creation, and in a special way over the nation of Israel. Israel rejected Him as king, so God gave them what they requested—to their own hurt. Israel's history under the kings illustrates what happens to a people reject God as their ruler, their King, and mere mortals reign in His stead.

Jeremiah lived to foretell, and to see, the demise of Jerusalem. His message was a sad one, warning Judah of the trouble to come. But, like so many of the warnings and judgments from the prophets there was also a message of hope.

I have emphasized the theme of "kings" in the Story of the Bible for one reason: to highlight the message of the prophets concerning the day God would once again reign as king. Jeremiah writes:

"Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall

execute justice and righteousness in the land. 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' (Jer. 23:5, 6).

The reference to David is an allusion to God's promises to David (2 Sam. 7; Ps. 89). The fulfillment of this promise comes when God rules the world again through His Son. This is the message of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is at the heart and core of Peter's message on Pentecost. Notice Peter's main points: Jesus was "attested to you by God...delivered up...crucified...killed...raised up...exalted...ascended." His conclusion? "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36).

Jeremiah's prophecy is fulfilled. God is once again ruling through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the good news!