

September 18 Su Reading 261 — Jeremiah 23:1-8 — A Righteous Branch

¹ *“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^[n] had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.”*

ESV Footnote

(23:8) Septuagint; Hebrew /

God Who Restores — Judah and Jerusalem were in big trouble. The good King Josiah was followed by four short reigns of unwise and wicked kings prior to the Babylonian exile. These last kings were said by God to be *“the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!”* (v. 1). The final king, Zedekiah, was the one whose sons were killed right in front of him, immediately after which his eyes were put out by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:7). Although God would punish His people for 70 years in Babylon, He would not only bring them back to their land (Jer. 23:3-4), but He promised a greater deliverance in the distant future, at which time He would *“raise up ... a righteous Branch”* (v. 5), who would be called *“The LORD is our righteousness”* (v. 6). That was a prophecy fulfilled finally by the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. God is a great restorer. He brought His people out of 400 years of bondage in Egypt and returned His punished people from Babylon, but His greatest rescue would be provided by the death of His own Son on the cross. He saved us by bringing us into the family of God and He also restores us when we fall into sin and receive His discipline. We are His sheep and He is committed to our care.

[Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven - YouTube](#)

Redeemed, restored, forgiven
Through Jesus' precious blood,
Heirs of His home in heaven
Oh, praise our pard'ning God!

— Henry W. Baker (1821-1877)

Meditation: Jeremiah was writing this text when Zedekiah was reigning as the last king of Judah. Zedekiah turned out to be a failure, even though his name ironically meant *“the LORD is my righteousness.”* The name of the final King of David, however, the Messiah, would be *“The LORD is*

our righteousness" (v. 6). Zedekiah represents the end of an era and Jesus represents the beginning of an everlasting era. He is the King who gives us His righteousness.

September 19 M Reading 262 — Jeremiah 29:1-14 — Plans I Have for You

¹ *These are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders of the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.* ² *This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metal workers had departed from Jerusalem.* ³ *The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It said:* ⁴ *"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:* ⁵ *Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce.* ⁶ *Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.* ⁷ *But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.* ⁸ *For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,*^[fn] ⁹ *for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, declares the LORD.*

¹⁰ *"For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.* ¹¹ *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare*^[fn] *and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.* ¹² *Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.* ¹³ *You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.* ¹⁴ *I will be found by you, declares the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.*

ESV Footnotes

(29:8) Hebrew *your dreams, which you cause to dream*

(29:11) Or *peace*

The Welfare State — The well-known verse 11 in this passage declares God's "*plans for welfare ... [for] a future and a hope.*" In fact, the whole passage says a lot about "*welfare*" here, using that word four times (vv. 7, 11). It is the familiar Hebrew word, "*shalom*," and has two basic meanings. One is *peace* and the other is *prosperity*. Peace can mean either external freedom from conflict with others or internal freedom from turmoil. When Jesus was about to leave this earth, He promised, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid*" (John 14:27). That is part of the internal "*welfare*" God has promised to all His people, for all time; it is the "*welfare state*" of inner peace. The prosperity-side of *shalom* is not limited to material things. It includes helping others, even those who might oppress you. God told the Jewish exiles in Babylon to "*seek the welfare of the city ... and pray ... on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare*" (Jer. 29:7). Do you pray regularly for your city, your state or province, and your nation? We benefit when they benefit. God's "*welfare plan*" for us now, as it was for the Jews in Babylon, is to provide His peace and prosperity.

Wonderful Peace - YouTube

Peace! Peace! Wonderful peace,
Coming down from the Father above;
Sweep over my spirit forever, I pray,
In fathomless billows of love.

What a treasure I have in this wonderful peace,
Buried deep in the heart of my soul;
So secure that no power can mine it away,
While the years of eternity roll.

— Warren D. Cornell (1858-1936)

September 20 Tu Reading 263 — Jeremiah 31:1-14 — An Everlasting Love

¹ *“At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people.”*

² *Thus says the LORD:*

*“The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,*

³ *the LORD appeared to him^[fn] from far away.
I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.*

⁴ *Again I will build you, and you shall be built,
O virgin Israel!
Again you shall adorn yourself with tambourines
and shall go forth in the dance of the merry-makers.*

⁵ *Again you shall plant vineyards
on the mountains of Samaria;
the planters shall plant
and shall enjoy the fruit.*

⁶ *For there shall be a day when watchmen will call
in the hill country of Ephraim:
‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion,
to the LORD our God.’”*

⁷ *For thus says the LORD:*

*“Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
‘O LORD, save your people,
the remnant of Israel.’”*

⁸ *Behold, I will bring them from the north country
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them the blind and the lame,
the pregnant woman and she who is in labor, together;
a great company, they shall return here.*

⁹ *With weeping they shall come,
and with pleas for mercy I will lead them back,*

*I will make them walk by brooks of water,
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble,
for I am a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn.*

- 10 *“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
and declare it in the coastlands far away;
say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him,
and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’*
- 11 *For the LORD has ransomed Jacob
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.*
- 12 *They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and over the young of the flock and the herd;
their life shall be like a watered garden,
and they shall languish no more.*
- 13 *Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,
and the young men and the old shall be merry.
I will turn their mourning into joy;
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.*
- 14 *I will feast the soul of the priests with abundance,
and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness,
declares the LORD.”*

ESV Footnote

(31:3) Septuagint; Hebrew *me*

Scattered and Gathered — Judah was being punished for rebelling against following God solely and wholeheartedly. God executed judgment and it hurt, but it was done in love—His “*everlasting love*” (v. 3). He did it to bring them back to Him. He scattered them to gather them: “*He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him...*” (v. 10). We read other expressions of God’s committed love for His people: “*I have continued my faithfulness to you*” (v. 3) and “*I am a father to Israel ... my firstborn*” (v. 9). God would bring them back from Babylon and re-establish them in the Promised Land. He would also bring back many Jews who had been deported and dispersed by the Assyrians many years earlier. In 1948, Israel was formally made a nation, and God has protected and prospered it tremendously since then. God does not give up on His own. He has committed His love for His chosen ones. He won’t give up on us, either. He may have to painfully discipline us, but He will gather us back to Himself again.

[O Love That Will Not Let Me Go - YouTube](#)

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee.
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

— George Matheson (1882)

¹⁶ “After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD, saying: ¹⁷ ‘Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you. ¹⁸ You show steadfast love to thousands, but you repay the guilt of fathers to their children after them, O great and mighty God, whose name is the LORD of hosts, ¹⁹ great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the children of man, rewarding each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds. ²⁰ You have shown signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and to this day in Israel and among all mankind, and have made a name for yourself, as at this day. ²¹ You brought your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and wonders, with a strong hand and outstretched arm, and with great terror. ²² And you gave them this land, which you swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey. ²³ And they entered and took possession of it. But they did not obey your voice or walk in your law. They did nothing of all you commanded them to do. Therefore you have made all this disaster come upon them. ²⁴ Behold, the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it, and because of sword and famine and pestilence the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it. ²⁵ Yet you, O Lord GOD, have said to me, “Buy the field for money and get witnesses”—though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans.”

²⁶ The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁷ “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?”

Field of Dreams — Jeremiah was a prisoner because of his prophecies about the destruction of Jerusalem. God sent Jeremiah’s cousin to the jail to ask Jeremiah to purchase a piece of land in his home town of Anathoth. God told him to buy it. Why? If Jerusalem and Judah would fall to Babylon, why should God want Jeremiah to spend his money for land he could seemingly never occupy? This was to be a symbolic action of assurance that the exiled Jews would once again possess the Promised Land. For Judah to be exiled and return 70 years later seemed like an impossibility, but it wasn’t. The reason was because of God’s omnipotence (being all-powerful). Jeremiah proclaimed in his prayer, “*Nothing is too hard for you*” (v. 17), and God confirmed it by asking the rhetorical question, “*Is anything too hard for me?*” (v. 27). What enemy has surrounded your “city of refuge”? Can God protect you? Yes, He is omnipotent. What promise or dream seems impossible to be fulfilled for you? Can God bring it to you anyway? Yes, God is omnipotent. Buy your field of dreams in faith!

[Nothing Is Impossible - YouTube](#)

Nothing is impossible when you put your trust in God.
Nothing is impossible when you’re trusting in His words.
Harken to the voice of God to thee,
“Is there anything too hard for Me?”
Then put your trust in God alone,
And rest upon His Word,
For everything, O everything, yes everything
Is possible with God.

— Eugene L. Clark (1975)

¹ The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard: ² “Thus says the LORD who made the earth,^[fn] the LORD who formed it to establish it—the LORD is his name: ³ Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. ⁴ For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege mounds and against the sword: ⁵ They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans and to fill them^[fn] with the dead bodies of men whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil. ⁶ Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. ⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. ⁹ And this city^[fn] shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them. They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.

¹⁰ “Thus says the LORD: In this place of which you say, ‘It is a waste without man or beast,’ in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again ¹¹ the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD:

“Give thanks to the LORD of hosts,
for the LORD is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever!”

For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the LORD.

¹² “Thus says the LORD of hosts: In this place that is waste, without man or beast, and in all of its cities, there shall again be habitations of shepherds resting their flocks. ¹³ In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the Shephelah, and in the cities of the Negeb, in the land of Benjamin, the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the LORD.

¹⁴ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

¹⁷ “For thus says the LORD: David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, ¹⁸ and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.”

¹⁹ The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: ²⁰ “Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, ²¹ then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. ²² As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.”

²³ *The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:* ²⁴ *“Have you not observed that these people are saying, ‘The LORD has rejected the two clans that he chose’? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight.* ²⁵ *Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth,* ²⁶ *then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.”*

ESV Footnotes

(33:2) Septuagint; Hebrew *it*

(33:5) That is, the torn-down houses

(33:9) Hebrew *And it*

What's in a Name? — We read at the beginning of this week that the coming Branch (Messiah) would have the name, “*The LORD is our righteousness*” (Jer. 23:6). In our passage for today, in a very similar paragraph, it is the restored city of Jerusalem that will be called, “*The LORD is our righteousness*” (v. 16). How far away is the moral character of your city from being known for its righteousness?! The present Jerusalem is not yet generally righteous either, but there is still a time in the future when the Messiah will return to reign in that city, and it can, then, legitimately be called by the name, “*The LORD is our righteousness.*” Even today, the Church could be labeled, “*The LORD is our righteousness.*” We are righteous because the righteous Christ dwells within our hearts. There is an interesting later connection in Rev. 3:12, where we are told that for “*The one who conquers ... I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem ... , and my own new name.*” We followers of Jesus have yet another name waiting for us in heaven, and it will likely also be tied to “*the LORD,*” our Yahweh.

[A New Name in Glory - YouTube](#)

There's a new name written down in glory,
And it's mine, oh yes, it's mine!
And the white-robed angels sing the story,
"A sinner has come home."
For there's a new name written down in glory,
And it's mine, oh yes, it's mine!
With my sins forgiven, I am bound for heaven,
Nevermore to roam.

— C. Austin Miles (1868-1946)

September 23 F Reading 266 — Psalm 74:9-23 — A Plea for Help

A Maskil^[fn] of Asaph...

- ⁹ *We do not see our signs;
there is no longer any prophet,
and there is none among us who knows how long.*
- ¹⁰ *How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name forever?*
- ¹¹ *Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand?
Take it from the fold of your garment^[fn] and destroy them!*
- ¹² *Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.*

- 13 *You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the sea monsters^[fn] on the waters.*
- 14 *You crushed the heads of Leviathan;
you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.*
- 15 *You split open springs and brooks;
you dried up ever-flowing streams.*
- 16 *Yours is the day, yours also the night;
you have established the heavenly lights and the sun.*
- 17 *You have fixed all the boundaries of the earth;
you have made summer and winter.*
- 18 *Remember this, O LORD, how the enemy scoffs,
and a foolish people reviles your name.*
- 19 *Do not deliver the soul of your dove to the wild beasts;
do not forget the life of your poor forever.*
- 20 *Have regard for the covenant,
for the dark places of the land are full of the habitations of violence.*
- 21 *Let not the downtrodden turn back in shame;
let the poor and needy praise your name.*
- 22 *Arise, O God, defend your cause;
remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day!*
- 23 *Do not forget the clamor of your foes,
the uproar of those who rise against you, which goes up continually!*

ESV Footnotes

(74:11) Hebrew *from your bosom*

(74:13) Or *the great sea creatures*

Remember This — Twice in this passage, the psalmist challenged God to remember how Israel's enemy scoffed at Yahweh (vv. 18, 22). He also urged God to "*not forget the life of your poor forever*" (v. 19). The psalmist remembered some important history of the mighty wisdom and power of God: He rescued His people from Egypt's slavery, saying, "*You divided the sea by your might*" (v. 13); He provided water for them in the wilderness, declaring, "*You split open springs and brooks*" (v. 15); and He created the universe (vv. 16-17). There is something that the psalmist seems to have forgotten, however. Since this psalm seems to fit chronologically at the time of Jerusalem's fall to Babylon, why does verse 9 claim that "*there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long*"? What about Jeremiah's messages from God that they would be defeated and that the exile would last for 70 years? (Jer. 29:10). God had told them, but they must have forgotten it. We also need to remember what God has already told us in His Word. That is why it is so important to develop the habit of reading the Bible every day, and then remember what He has told us. When we bring our requests to God, it is also good to remember His history of working with unlimited wisdom and power. Remember that He can do anything, and remember what He has already done for you.

[We Remember - YouTube](#)

We remember how You loved us to Your death,
And still we celebrate, for You are with us here;
And we believe that we will see You when you come,
In your glory, Lord, we remember, we celebrate, we believe.

— Marty Haugen (b. 1950)

September 24 Sa Reading 267 — Habakkuk 3:16-19 — The God of My Salvation

16 *I hear, and my body trembles;
my lips quiver at the sound;
rottenness enters into my bones;
my legs tremble beneath me.
Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble
to come upon people who invade us.*

17 *Though the fig tree should not blossom,
nor fruit be on the vines,
the produce of the olive fail
and the fields yield no food,
the flock be cut off from the fold
and there be no herd in the stalls,*

18 *yet I will rejoice in the LORD;
I will take joy in the God of my salvation.*

19 *GOD, the Lord, is my strength;
he makes my feet like the deer's;
he makes me tread on my high places.*

To the choirmaster: with stringed^[fn] instruments.

ESV Footnotes

(3:13) The meaning of the Hebrew line is uncertain

(3:19) Hebrew *my stringed*

Wait and Rejoice — Habakkuk lived at the same time as Jeremiah. Babylon was in the process of conquering Judah, and Jerusalem was about to be destroyed. He trembled and quivered in fear (v. 16), but he knew God was in control of the situation. After God used Babylon to punish Judah for their rebellion against Yahweh, He would also punish Babylon. So, Habakkuk, “*Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us*” (v. 16). Can we “*quietly wait*” for God’s judgment to come upon sinful people who may oppress us? It is hard to wait when we are in trouble, but we can do it if we are convinced that our all-wise, all-powerful, perfectly-just God is in control of directing history and applying justice. Just wait! There is another thing that Habakkuk determined to do while facing a lack of food: “...*yet I will rejoice...*” (v. 18). Waiting is hard enough, but rejoicing in times of trouble is even more challenging. To do that, Habakkuk had to lift his focus from his circumstances to his Savior: “...*yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation*” (v. 18). In the midst of physical trouble, God can make me “*tread on my high places*” (v. 19). As the sure-footed deer can climb to rocky heights, so we can experience spiritual highs with God, even in times of trouble. Rejoice while you wait!

[Rejoice In the Lord - YouTube](#)

O rejoice in the Lord, He makes no mistake.
He knoweth the end of each path that I take.
For when I am tried and purified,
I shall come forth as gold.

— Ron Hamilton (1987)