

# RULES

## JEREMIAH 23:1-12

Author Jonathan Alter wrote about former President Jimmy Carter: “He practiced what he preached. As a state senator, Carter had turned down an offer of free eyeglasses from an optometrist, and as governor, he reimbursed a sporting goods store that sent him a single can of tennis balls... Even his enemies called him squeaky clean.” Whether you agreed with his politics or not, Jimmy Carter seemed to be a man of integrity.

1. Who are some godly political and spiritual leaders you appreciate?
2. What happens when leaders’ words and actions don’t align? (Promises are broken; people are hurt; the leader shows that he or she can’t be trusted; etc.)

Through Jeremiah, God promised that one day He would give His people a trustworthy and righteous Ruler. This Ruler has already come; He is the Lord Jesus Christ who will reign on His throne for eternity.

### **NEW SHEPHERDS! Read Jeremiah 23:1-4**

1. When God said “Woe to the shepherds...” what does it convey to them? (It is used to announce a threatening declaration of calamity. Judgment is coming because you have failed.)
2. What ways did the leaders of Judah fail to guide the people well? (They destroy the sheep. They scatter the sheep. They banished them. They had not attended them.)
3. How is a leader like a shepherd? (Sheep, like people, need strong leaders and would stray into danger without the diligence and protection of the shepherd.)
4. How can we be careful about the leaders we follow?

It should make us more cognizant about the leaders we are becoming.

5. What did God say He was going to do in these verses? (Gather the remnant. I will return them to their grazing land. I will raise up shepherds over them.)
6. What will be the result of this on the sheep? (They will not be afraid or dismayed and none of them will be missing.)

God always has a remnant of His people and from them He will raise up a great nation.

The leaders of Judah had failed to shepherd their people well. They were more worried about their own needs than the needs of their “flock.” God called them to accountability and promised to raise up new, faithful shepherds who would lead well.

I believe verses 5-6 are the key verses in this week’s passage.

### **RIGHTEOUS BRANCH! Read Jeremiah 23:5-6**

A key part of God’s promise for the future was the Messiah that He would send. God says I’ll raise up a “righteous Branch, and He will reign as King”—so this “branch” is a Person, who will be a King.

1. What is the name that He will be called by? (“The LORD our righteousness.”)
2. What does this name mean? (It is not just another name for God. It describes how we are saved.)
3. What does righteousness mean? (“Righteousness” means “rightness” with God.)
4. How can we be “right” with God? (Only by being perfect or someone standing in our stead who is perfect.)
5. What is the source of our righteousness?

Most people try to become “righteous” by doing their own good words and deeds. (Benjamin Franklin story.)

6. Can you think of any religion that is not based on a person’s own good works or deeds other than Christianity?

We are going to look at several verses and you will hear over and over that our works can't save us. Rom. 3:10; 3:20; 3:23; Gal. 2:16; Titus 3:5; James 2:10.

All these verses and more make it clear, that we cannot be saved by our OWN righteousness

7. So how can we be saved? (Our righteousness is not good enough to save us, so God made a way to give us HIS righteousness.)

It is only through what Jesus did for us on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead can we be saved through faith.

2 Cor. 5:21 "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." This is the "great exchange": we give Him all our unrighteousness and He gives us His righteousness.

### **Read Jeremiah 23:7-8**

1. At this point in the Bible story what was the greatest act of deliverance Israel had experienced? (The escape from Egyptian slavery approximately one thousand years earlier.)
2. What did God say would replace that event and be even greater for Israel? (The gathering of His people from all of the lands where He had scattered them as a result of their sin.)

The people of Judah had been scattered because of their sinful rebellion. But God would gather His people back to the land of Israel. And in time, Jesus Christ, God's "Righteous Branch" from the line of David, would come to bring freedom from the bondage of sin for all people.

Jeremiah now turns his attention to Israel's spiritual leaders, especially the prophets, who told the people what they wanted to hear. Judah's false prophets claimed to speak for the Lord without any message from God, but they were leading Judah to its doom!

### **IMPENDING DISASTER! Read Jeremiah 23:9-12**

In these 12 verses we've read today the phrase "This is the LORD's declaration" is used 7 times. This is to emphasize that these words are not something Jeremiah dreamed up, this is God's message!

1. How had the situation impacted Jeremiah personally? (Verses 9-11. He is brokenhearted!)
  2. Why would a person willingly follow a false prophet? (They proclaim what people want to hear.)
- At the same time Jeremiah, and the other prophets of God were proclaiming God's judgment is coming, the false prophets were claiming peace was coming. They said God was going to bless them not bring judgment. Which message would you want to hear?
3. What did God say He would do to the false prophets? (Their path would be like a "slippery" slope, they would fall down and God would "bring disaster on them.")
  4. What message is there here for church leaders today? (God will hold them accountable for how they care for His church—flock!)
  5. What attributes should believers be looking for in those they allow to influence them? (Godliness; integrity; the talk matches the walk; concern for the "sheep." Etc.

False prophets and heretical teachers are still at work in the world today. And they will still try to deceive anyone they can, including believers. Like the people of Judah long ago, we must be careful about who we allow to influence us. It takes constant vigilance!

### **SUMMARY AND CHALLENGE!**

1. What does this week's Scripture passage say about leadership and accountability? (We will be held accountable for the way we lead those we influence.)
2. Who are the people whom you influence?
3. How you are pointing them to Christ, or are your attitudes and actions influencing them toward unfaithfulness to Christ?

"Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD

And whose hope is the LORD  
For he shall be like a tree planted by waters,  
Which spreads out its roots by the river,  
And will not fear when heat comes;  
But its leaf will be green,  
And will not be anxious in the year of drought,  
Nor will cease from yielding fruit.”  
Jeremiah 17:7-8

Are you well rooted in Christ?